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KṚṢṆA: LORD OR AVATĀRA?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KṚṢṆA AND VIṢṆU

Freda Matchett

Kṛṣṇa:
Lord or Avatāra?

The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu

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Kṛṣṇa:
Lord or Avatāra?

The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu

in the context of the *avatarā* myth as presented by
the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*

Freda Matchett

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To the memory of my parents
ALICE ROSETTA and WILLIAM MATCHETT

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Chapter One

Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu and the avatāra myth

Believers in God, whatever their religious affiliation, find themselves trying to reconcile two apparently opposing needs. On the one hand the object of their worship must be beyond human comprehension, supreme over the universe which he/she creates, sustains and encompasses, and on the other hand they need a God whose love and care are accessible to the humblest worshipper. Sometimes the attempt to satisfy these needs has taken the form of postulating a transcendent Supreme God who manifests him/herself in an accessible form or a variety of such forms. Within Hindu theism, or more precisely within Vaiṣṇavism, these needs were factors in the rise of the *avatāra* doctrine, the idea that the Supreme God, the Lord of the world, 'descended'[1] from time to time into his own world to help its inhabitants.

The best-known of these 'descents' is Kṛṣṇa. The Vaiṣṇava tradition oscillates between two different ways of seeing him. Besides being the eighth in one version of the standard list of the Supreme God Viṣṇu's ten *avatāras*,[2] he is also worshipped by millions in India and throughout the world as Supreme God himself (even though the very same temple in which Kṛṣṇa's image occupies the central place may also contain a picture in which he features among the *avatāras*). A historical progression from being admired as a tribal hero to being worshipped as God might seem to be the reason for this dual status of Kṛṣṇa,[3] but a serious objection to such an explanation is constituted by the fact that it is in one of the earliest texts which centre upon Kṛṣṇa, the *Bhagavadgītā*, that he appears at his most God-like. The Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā*, the Bhagavān who teaches Arjuna that all offerings to any divinity are really offered to him, is obviously presenting himself as the one true God. Yet it may be claimed that Kṛṣṇa is

speaking here as one of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, so that it is Viṣṇu who is being presented as God. As Friedhelm Hardy says, the concept of Bhagavān, 'a single, all-powerful, eternal, personal and loving God … is an empty slot, to be filled by concrete characteristics which then make up a specific Bhagavān-figure who serves as (the one and only) God to a given group of people'.[4] In the case of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, it is not easy to see whether there are two contenders for this slot or whether Kṛṣṇa is to be subordinated to Viṣṇu as one among several of the latter's manifestations.

This book sets out to explore the relationship between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa in the context of the *avatāra* myth as it is presented in three major Vaiṣṇava texts of the first millennium CE: the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.[5] The context of the *avatāra* myth would appear to foreclose the question of Kṛṣṇa's status. If he is one of the subordinate manifestations of Viṣṇu, the claims of those who see him as God in his own right can surely be dismissed as poetic hyperbole rather than taken seriously as theological assertions. Yet the *avatāra* myth may be used in such a way as to affirm Kṛṣṇa's supremacy rather than to deny it, so that Kṛṣṇa's status in these three texts is not the foregone conclusion that it might seem.

None of these texts has ever been regarded, or ought to be regarded, as a piece of systematic theology. All three deal in narrative, poetry and myth, not in doctrine and argument. Yet they use narrative, poetry and myth in such a way as to set up tensions and balances between the figures of Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu, weaving together the same themes in different ways. The *Harivaṃśa* sets Kṛṣṇa's life into the overall context of the *Mahābhārata*, while supplying its own immediate context which relates Kṛṣṇa to Viṣṇu and to the universe. In the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* this life is presented in relation to a fully developed cosmology. In the *Viṣṇu* the *avatāra* idea is almost lost in this new perspective, but in the *Bhāgavata* it is brought into play again in a new and dynamic way, so that Kṛṣṇa's story becomes both the key to the universe's meaning and the model of that divine grace which informs all the other *avatāra* stories.

The literary standing of the Purāṇas, the genre to which all three texts belong,[6] has usually been regarded as low by both Indian and Western scholars. For Indian scholars this is because they fail to conform to the standards of Sanskrit poetics.[7] For Westerners it is at least partly because they are mainly compilations of traditional material rather than original compositions. In Western culture the word 'compilation' tends to have a somewhat negative meaning, being often prefaced by the adjective 'mere'.[8] It suggests a collage of miscellaneous material with little in the way of structure and

development, often centred loosely upon some well-worn theme and repeating what is already familiar. A 'compiler' likewise calls to mind 'someone not particularly creative or imaginative, and certainly not original'.[9] Within the Hindu tradition, however, 'compilation' and 'compiler' have higher connotations. One of the most prestigious figures in Hindu mythology is Vyāsa. He is the origin, humanly speaking, of the Vedas, the *Vedāntasūtra*, the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. He is *the* Arranger or Compiler: that is what his name, or to be more precise his title, means.[10]

For the Hindu, the act of arranging is in fact a form of creating, perhaps even the highest form. As Hindus see the cosmos, it is created and recreated in a never-ending cycle of great acts of arrangement and rearrangement. In contrast to the Christian idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, the Hindu tradition sees creation as the repeated differentiation of the unmanifest primordial materiality into a seemingly infinite number of forms which can be arranged into a variety of patterns,[11] not only through re-creation (where the same patterns recur, as *Viṣṇu* 1.5.63–7 indicates), but also through the way in which various myths or cycles of myths can arrange themes or figures in different sequences.[12] It is this perception of the cosmos which gives to Hindu mythology its kaleidoscopic quality: the basic elements can be shaken up together time and again so that they fall into new configurations.[13]

In the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata*, the basic elements of the *avatāra* myth and the life of Kṛṣṇa are shaken up together so as to produce three different configurations. To a greater or lesser degree all three texts make use of the same traditional material, but they ring the changes on it by various devices such as framing, drawing of parallels, introducing passages of praise or prayer (this is especially true of the *Viṣṇu*), shifts in perspective, changes in time, echoes of other texts (used to particular effect in the *Bhāgavata*), use of older ideas to give a new interpretation, and relocation of incidents. These devices will be amply illustrated in later chapters. The immediate task is to separate out the theological and the literary strands of this study, so this chapter will deal first with the *avatāra* myth as a theological development within Vaiṣṇavism and then with the three texts in which the use of the *avatāra* myth is to be explored.

THE *AVATĀRA* DRAMA: KṚṢṆA AS ACTOR AND AS ROLE

Although its primary meaning is 'descent', the word *avatāra* is often translated into English as 'incarnation'. This is misleading because it

suggests too strong a resemblance to the Incarnation of Christian theology. The Latin *incarnatio*, like the Greek *ensarkosis* which it translates, implies that what is important in the Christian concept is that the divine personage should be 'in the flesh', i.e. totally real in human terms, all of a piece with the rest of human history. Whereas Christians have been reluctant to use words like 'appearance' or 'manifestation' of their incarnate Lord, such ideas are implicit in the term *avatāra*, since it has associations with the theatre (*raṅgāvataraṇa*, 'entering on the stage', is a word for the acting profession; *raṅgāvatāraka* is an actor).[14] The *avatāra* is God appearing upon the world's stage, having descended from the highest level of reality to that of the *trailokya* (the triple world of *devas, asuras*[15] and human beings) in order to perform some beneficial action, notably the restoration of the socio-cosmic order (*dharma*).[16] It is not simply a question of the transformation of any celestial being into another shape. The transformation must be that of the Supreme God and it must be undertaken for the good of the world, or of some individual within the world.

The *avatāra* myth is usually regarded as a distinctive feature of Vaiṣṇavism. Although there are texts which describe successive manifestations of Śiva and Devī,[17] it is clear from even a superficial reading that these passages are directly imitative of Vaiṣṇava *avatāra* lists.[18] The *avatāras* of Viṣṇu carry a greater theological weight than those of Śiva or Devī. The qualities which characterise Śiva — e.g. his combination of ascetic and householder lifestyles, the extravagance of his grief or anger[19] — are not illustrated by stories of his *avatāras*. Take away Śiva's *avatāras* and a rich mythology remains. Take away the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and his mythology is impoverished because it is precisely in these episodes that he most often shows his characteristic concern for *dharma*, his benevolence towards human beings and his power to save.

Although it is usual to speak of Viṣṇu as the source of the *avatāras*, this is only one of the names of the Supreme God of Vaiṣṇavism. He is also known as Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa, and behind each of these names is a divine figure with his own characteristics and associations. The fact that the tradition which worships him is known as Vaiṣṇavism does not mean that the process of fusion, whereby the traits of these four divine figures were combined, was one in which Viṣṇu was always dominant, nor does it mean that the process began with his followers. Indeed expressions such as 'followers of Viṣṇu' or 'cult of Viṣṇu' are meaningless in the earliest stages of this development.[20] It is much more likely that it was the growth of the cult of Kṛṣṇa which gave rise to this process of fusion, a process

which appears to have taken place somewhere between the fifth and second centuries BCE, although its precise stages are impossible to document and peripheral to the main themes of this study.[21]

A brief look at each of these four divine personae of the Supreme God of Vaiṣṇavism will show their chief characteristics and their affinities with each other. The traditional association of **Viṣṇu** with √*viś* (to enter) establishes him as the God who enters or pervades the universe.[22] Although a relatively minor figure in the Vedic pantheon,[23] he is not an insignificant one. He is the *axis mundi*, upholding the threefold universe.[24] He is Indra's brother and close friend, drinking *soma* with him and sharing his home.[25] He is a hero: his 'mighty deeds' which are celebrated in the *Viṣṇusūkta* (1.154) consist of three great strides which are described again and again,[26] and are intimately connected with Indra's victory over VṚtra.[27] Indeed there is one hymn which ends with the suggestion that Viṣṇu's striding and Indra's killing of VṚtra are to be seen as two aspects of the divine work of creation.[28] Benevolence towards human beings is the general attitude of all the Vedic gods,[29] but Viṣṇu is specially seen as their protector and friend.[30] His measuring out of the earth is said to be undertaken on behalf of the human race.[31] He is the protector of the unborn child.[32] In the Brāhmaṇas, and particularly in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, Viṣṇu is identified with the Vedic sacrifice.[33]

Nārāyaṇa is also linked with sacrifice in the earliest known references to him. In *ŚB* 12.3.4.1, 13.6.1.1, Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa is given as the name of the self-offered victim in the great cosmic sacrifice of Ṛ*V* 10.90. Although not mentioned in the Ṛg*Veda* itself, Nārāyaṇa came to be regarded as the seer who composed this hymn. It is possible that the Ṛṣi who composed the *Puruṣasūkta* may have been assimilated to the Puruṣa whose praise he had sung, and thus himself become the object of a cult.[34] Certainly the figure of a divine Ṛṣi named Nārāyaṇa, along with his companion Nara, appears in many epic and purāṇic texts.[35]

Whereas Viṣṇu's strides and his character of pervasiveness link him with the spaciousness of the upper air, Nārāyaṇa's connections are with water.[36] The most common etymology of his name, from the *Mahābhārata* onwards, indicates this:

> The waters are called *nāras*: I gave them the name; therefore I am called Nārāyaṇa, for the waters are my perpetual course (*āpo nārā iti proktāḥ saṃjñānāma kṚtaṃ mayā / tena nārāyaṇo 'smy ukto mama tad dhy ayanaṃ sadā // Mbh* 3.187.3)[37]

This etymology is reinforced by the sculptured representations which are found of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa sleeping upon the serpent Ananta/Śeṣa who floats upon the cosmic ocean during the periods of dissolution

which end each *kalpa*.[38]

The image of the sleeping Nārāyaṇa may also have facilitated the link between this god and Viṣṇu, because Viṣṇu too is said to have periods of sleep which have consequences for the socio-cosmic order. During each rainy season he falls asleep; no sacrifices can be performed then, and Indra does Viṣṇu's usual work. This idea is expressed in *Hv* 40.23–5:

> 23 When the gods cannot see Acyuta as he sleeps, then he goes to sleep at the end of the hot season and wakes when the rainy season is over. 24 While he is asleep no sacrificial ceremonies, with their purifying texts, take place: Madhusūdana awakes for the sacrifice at the beginning of autumn. 25 Then the Lord of the clouds turns this wheel of the year; while Viṣṇu sleeps, Indra performs his work (23 *yadainaṃ vīkṣituṃ devā na śekuḥ suptam acyutam / tataḥ svapiti gharmānte jāgarti jaladakṣaye //* 24 *tasmin supte na variante mantrapūtāḥ kratukriyāḥ / śaratpravṛttayajño hi jāgarti madhusūdanaḥ //* 25 *tad idaṃ vārṣikaṃ cakraṃ kārayaty ambudeśvaraḥ / vaiṣṇavaṃ karma kurvāṇaḥ supte viṣṇau puraṃdaraḥ //*)

It must have been easy for this annual sleep of Viṣṇu, reflecting the pause in sacrificial ceremonies which the rainy season brought in Vedic times, to become identified with the sleep of Nārāyaṇa, the Puruṣa who absorbs all things into himself at the end of each *kalpa*. Indeed, *Hv* 40 shows that this identification has already been made: the sleeping Viṣṇu lies in 'the hermitage called by his own name Nārāyaṇa' (*svena nāmnā parijñātaṃ … taṃ nārāyaṇāśramam, Hv* 40.3).

Vāsudeva appears to have a twofold character. The traditional etymology of his name, 'dwelling in all things'[39] aligns him with Viṣṇu as a divine figure with cosmic concerns. Yet he appears in other contexts as a tribal hero of the Vṛṣṇi clan. There is a first century CE inscription, found on a slab used in the construction of a well near the village of Morā in the Mathurā area,[40] which refers to images 'of the five holy heroes' (*bhagavatāṃ pañcavīrāṇām*) of the Vṛṣṇis. These are usually identified with the five heroes listed in *Vāyu* 97.1b-2a: Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Sāmba and Aniruddha.[41] Three of the four names associated with Vāsudeva in this formula (Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) are also found in a late section of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (*Mbh* 12.321–39), usually regarded as one of the earliest documents of the Pāñcarātra tradition.[42] As its title indicates, its usual name for the Supreme God is Nārāyaṇa, but in *Mbh* 12.326.28–40 it is Vāsudeva which is the name of the Supreme God and also the name of the first of four *vyūhas* which emanate from him,[43] the other three being Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha.

The name **Kṛṣṇa** means 'black', which has generally been held to point to a non-Aryan origin.[44] There appear to have been two cycles

of Kṛṣṇa stories, in which the hero's life is displayed in two different lights: (1) as a cowherd living in the forests around Mt Govardhana; (2) as a *kṣatriya* of the Yādava clan, friend of the Pāṇḍavas and founder of the city of Dvārakā.[45] Probably these were once independent figures, Kṛṣṇa Gopāla and Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, but texts which tell the whole story of Kṛṣṇa's life link them together by having him born into a *kṣatriya* family and smuggled out secretly to grow up in a cowherd village, in order to escape the murderous designs of his kinsman Kaṃsa. The fact that in this story Kṛṣṇa's mother's name is Devakī may also link him with the Kṛṣṇa Devakīputra who is said in *ChU* 3.17.6 to have been instructed by Ghora Āṅgirasa.

Although the stories of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla became part of the main Vaiṣṇava tradition later than those of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, they probably circulated for some centuries earlier among the cattle-rearing tribes of north-west and western India. The tribe with which they are most often associated is that of the Ābhīras. There is some debate as to whether this tribe were immigrants or natives of India, but it is generally accepted that they were settled there by the third century BCE.[46] As for the *kṣatriya* Kṛṣṇa, through the connections between the Yādava clan and the Vṛṣṇis, he became fused with the latters' hero-divinity, Vāsudeva.[47] Once this fusion had happened, the easiest way of accounting for the fact that the hero had two names, Kṛṣṇa and Vāsudeva, was to say that his father was called Vasudeva, so that the second name was a patronymic.[48]

The synthesis of Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa probably represents, as R. N. Dandekar suggests, an attempt on the part of an originally non-Vedic movement, 'the new Kṛṣṇaism', formed by an 'amalgamation of the Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa-religion and the Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa-religion', to establish a rapport with Vedism which would revitalise the latter and give the authority of ancient origins to the new movement.[49] At first sight this makes the *avatāra* myth, which subordinates Kṛṣṇa to Viṣṇu, seem an unlikely development in a process of fusion in which Kṛṣṇa was obviously a more vigorous element than Viṣṇu. How did it happen that the worshippers of Kṛṣṇa should have countenanced the *avatāra* idea, which gave their god a subordinate place to Viṣṇu as one of his manifestations?

The answer to this question probably lies in the fact that they had a problem as to how to reconcile Kṛṣṇa's human life with his divine status. Once he was identified with the Viṣṇu whose abode was the *parama pada* above all mortal comprehension,[50] and with the Nārāyaṇa whose perpetual course was the waters, this human life could most easily be explained by presenting him as a lower manifestation of a higher divinity. The *avatāra* myth gave coherence

to a composite deity whose features included those of 'a god who had entered human history'[51] as one of his components. But it is important to remember that Kṛṣṇa was from early times one of the names for the divine actor in the *avatāra* drama as well as the name of one of the roles which that actor plays.

To turn now to these roles, ten of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* came to be regarded as his major appearances: Matsya (the fish), Kūrma (the tortoise), Varāha (the boar), Narasiṃha (the man-lion), Vṃmana (the dwarf), Paraśurāma (Rāma with the axe), Rāma (the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*), either Kṛṣṇa or his brother Balarāma (also known as Saṃkarṣaṇa), the Buddha, and Kalki (a figure yet to appear who will one day cleanse the world of all evil and fit it for a new beginning). The ten figures emerged from a process of selection which continued through several centuries.[52] They are so diverse from each other in origin and character that it is hard to see what the criteria involved in this selection could have been.[53] Nor is any reason ever given for the emergence of a list of ten rather than of any other number.

It is important to distinguish between the individual stories which have been incorporated into this *daśāvatāra* sequence and the *avatāra* myth itself. Some of the former are primal myths which express basic insights into the nature of the world and into the human condition. The latter is a secondary myth, doctrinal or ideological in character and purpose, which has been imposed upon the former in order to give them a common frame of reference and a particular theological character which they did not originally possess.[54] Perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of the *avatāra* doctrine rather than the *avatāra* myth, but 'doctrine' suggests something which could be part of a system or an argument rather than something presented, as it always is in the Purāṇas, in narrative form. 'A doctrinal myth' is therefore the most fitting description. There are other doctrinal myths within the Hindu tradition, notably that of the *trimūrti*, which also develops during the purāṇic period, and which not only links the three *guṇas* with Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva and their respective operations of creation, maintenance and destruction, but also establishes a framework in which the two great gods Viṣṇu and Śiva can coexist.

The narrative outline of the *avatāra* myth is clear and simple: the triple world is out of balance in some way so that *adharma* is prevailing over *dharma*; the Supreme God descends into it, playing the role of some animal or human being, and restores its balance. Yet there is ambiguity in the myth also, arising from the fact that the Supreme God has several names and that one of them, Kṛṣṇa, is also the name of the figure who often occupies the eighth role in the *avatāra* list. Is he the Supreme Actor himself or simply one of ten roles

which are all assumed by, and subordinate to, the Supreme Actor?

THREE VERSIONS OF THE *AVATĀRA* DRAMA

It has already been stated that the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu*, and the *Bhāgavata* may all be regarded as belonging to the purāṇic genre. This is not an easy genre to define, whether in terms of subject-matter or of form. There are scores of extant *purāṇas*,[55] and their subject matter is wide-ranging and various. Their form, on the other hand, is unvarying. They consist of long dialogues between a narrator, who is the major contributor in terms of volume, and a questioner who, to some extent, controls the direction of the narrative by requests for information and occasional comments. But this is a form which they share with other branches of literature within the Hindu religious tradition, and which is in no way distinctive of any one particular genre.

The Purāṇas' own self-definition lies in their name, and in the word *pañcalakṣaṇa* which they use to describe themselves. The word *purāṇa* means 'old' when used as an adjective, and 'something belonging to the past' or 'an ancient tale' as a noun. In transmitting these ancient tales the Purāṇas see themselves as repositories of brāhmaṇical wisdom, 'in agreement with the Vedas' (*vedasammata*, cf. *Viṣṇu* 6.8.12) or even 'equal to the Vedas' (*vedasammita, Vāyu* 1.11; 4.12),[56] and yet, unlike the Vedas, as dispensing this wisdom in a form which can be understood by even the humblest members of society.[57] The definition of a *purāṇa* as *pañcalakṣaṇa*, which is first found in Amarasiṃha's Lexicon 'dated variously in the fifth or sixth century A.D.',[58] is usually translated as 'having five characteristic topics', because this is how the Purāṇas themselves interpret it. *Vāyu* 4.10b–11a claims:

> A *purāṇa* has five characteristic topics, i.e. creation, destruction, genealogies, reigns of the Manus, and supplementary stories about those included in the genealogies (*sargaś ca pratisargaś ca vaṃśo manvantarāṅi ca // vaṃśānucaritaṃ ceti purāṇaṃ pañcalakṣaṇam /*)[59]

My translation here of 'the 'five characteristic topics' differs in some ways from that which Wilson, following Colebrooke, used in the preface to his translation of the *Viṣṇu* in 1840:

> … 1. Primary creation, or cosmogony; 2. Secondary creation, or the destruction and renovation of worlds, including chronology; 3. Genealogy of gods and patriarchs; 4. Reigns of the Manus, or periods called Manvantaras; and 5. History, or such particulars as have been preserved of the princes of the solar and lunar races, and of their descendants to modern times.[60]

These differences are not just at the level of words. They spring from the fact that I do not believe, as did Wilson and those scholars who have followed his lead, that the *pañcalakṣaṇa* verses were intended as a table of contents, listing five sequential blocks of material. *'Sargaś ca pratisargaś ca'* can therefore keep its more likely meaning of 'creation and destruction' because *pratisarga* no longer has to be interpreted in some way which places it between 'creation' and 'genealogies'.[61] *'Vaṃśa'* can be taken to mean genealogies in general, rather than being related only to 'gods and patriarchs', with royal genealogies being put into the fifth category of *vaṃśānucarita*. The way in which *vaṃśa* and *vaṃśānucarita* intertwine and overlap with each other is just one indication that these various categories were never understood by the *paurāṇikas* as self-contained blocks, but as interrelated themes. Rather than taking *pañcalakṣaṇa* as referring to a table of contents, I prefer V. Narayana Rao's approach to it as 'the ideological frame that transforms whatever content is incorporated into that frame'. He goes on to say, 'Since the ideas of *pañcalakṣaṇa* are tacitly assumed in the Brahminic worldview, they do not appear in every Purāṇa and do not constitute a sizeable length of the text even when they appear'.[62]

Of the three purāṇic texts which are being considered here, the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* certainly set out their own versions of 'the Brahminic worldview'. The *Harivaṃśa* is more concerned to add its own particular features to the world-view of the *Mahābhārata*. What is true of all of them is that they make more sense when read as wholes than they do when fragmented into different topics or sections. Simply to compare together each one's *Kṛṣṇacarita*, for instance, would be to miss or misunderstand a great deal of what each whole text is saying, because its message is in part conveyed by its placing of the *Kṛṣṇacarita* in relation to the whole.[63]

Yet over the last hundred years the Purāṇas have rarely been treated as integrated texts. They have been used as quarries for various types of material (for history, as by Pargiter; for *dharmaśāstra* as by Hazra and Kane; for myths, as by O'Flaherty and Biardeau) or they have been dealt with by the method which Hacker employed in *Prahlāda*: by isolating episodes and comparing together the versions of them found in different texts. A notable exception to this is Greg Bailey. Near the beginning of his introduction to the *Upāsanākhaṇḍa* of the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa* he deplores the 'particular brand of historicism which has not come to terms with the proposition that the basic unit of analysis in purāṇic studies must be the Purāṇa considered as a single synchronic literary unit',[64] and makes it plain that his own approach remains the one which he had already stated earlier: '… I

work from the assumption that the best way to gain an understanding of Purāṇic contents is to take for granted the integrity of the Purāṇa as a self-contained unit organised in the way that it appears to us today in manuscript or edited version'.[65]

Throughout this study, I have tried to approach each of the texts as a whole. Although I have chosen to explore a particular theme, I have not concentrated on the *Kṛṣṇacaritas* in isolation, nor have I abstracted *avatāra* lists and related passages from the texts, connected them with one another and insulated them from all their connections with their original context. Instead I have tried to set out the major theological perspectives of each text, and to show the place within these of Kṛṣṇa's relationship to Viṣṇu and to the other *avatāras*. The decision to treat the texts in this way was not one which I took at the beginning of my exploration of this theme, but one which was almost forced upon me by the texts themselves, as I became increasingly aware of how they had arranged and rearranged their material in order to express their own viewpoints.

Thus, in maintaining that the texts should be treated as wholes, I am not claiming that any one of them is the work of an individual author, but that all show a high degree of 'creative compilation' in their selection and arrangement of earlier material. Rather than analysing the texts into component parts of diverse date and provenance, I am seeking to show how these parts mesh together to build up a distinctive theology and cosmology. Again, this is an approach which few scholars have undertaken, although, in addition to Bailey's work, there are articles by David Pocock[66] and Robert Goldman[67] which also treat purāṇic material in a way which shows the interrelation between literary and theological or mythological concerns. Like all the Sanskrit *purāṇas*, the three in question have been produced by brahmins, so that they all three express some kind of brāhmaṇical ideology. But each version of this ideology has its own individual features, because of the particular circumstances in which each text was composed. This means that even though this study is concerned with exploring the world which springs from the text rather than the world from which the text springs, some attention must be paid to locating each text at its own point in the history of India and of the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

1. The *Harivaṃśa*

Writing in 1968, Daniel H. H. Ingalls spoke of 'the general consensus that the *Harivaṃśa* dates from between the birth of Christ and the third century A.D'.[68] A year later P. L. Vaidya, who edited the text as

part of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, set the date of the 'oldest form of the *Harivaṃśa*' at about 300 CE.[69] The somewhat earlier dating of Ingalls is upheld, however, by André Couture in the introduction to his recent French translation of 1991; he favours '… the middle or the end of the Kuṣāṇa period, that is to say somewhere between the first and the third century of our era'.[70] He supports this date by reference to N. P. Joshi's identification of 'a series of passages which could possibly allude to artistic representations typical of the Kuṣāṇa period or of the Śuṅga period which preceded it',[71] as well as the resemblance which Joshi sees between descriptions of Saṃkarṣaṇa in the *Harivaṃśa* and Kuṣāṇa sculptures of him.[72] He also points to the use of *devaputra* in *Hv* 71.49, saying that this word was adopted as a title by the Kuṣāṇa dynasty and by no other in Indian history.[73]

Another pointer to a Kuṣāṇa date for the *Harivaṃśa* is provided almost accidentally by Doris Srinivasan in an article which she herself regards as supporting a much later date.[74] After remarking that, in spite of its importance for iconography and its connections with Kṛṣṇa's story, Mathurā seems to have produced scarcely any sculptured representations of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla in the Kuṣāṇa (or even the Gupta) period, she goes on to describe what it did produce: sculptured triads of Saṃkarṣaṇa, Ekānaṃśā and Vāsudeva.[75] In the *Harivaṃśa*, and in no other known version of Kṛṣṇa's story, this trio is important, as the third chapter of this study will show.

Both in Vaidya's Critical Edition and in the Vulgate version, the *Harivaṃśa* consists of three books: the *Harivaṃśaparvan* made up mainly of material which is found also in other *purāṇas*, the *Viṣṇuparvan*, which tells the story of Kṛṣṇa's life and is the central part of the text in every sense, and the *Bhaviṣyaparvan*, extremely short in the Critical Edition, but enormously expanded in the Vulgate to include creation myths, extended stories of Varāha, Vāmana and Narasiṃha, and much other material. The whole text is attached to the *Mahābhārata* as a supplement (*khila*), although there is no agreement as to how this came about. Ingalls believes that the purāṇic material in the first and third books is 'only a framework' to the *Kṛṣṇacarita* contained in the second,[76] and presumably only useful in making the link with the Epic. Horst Brinkhaus, however, claims that this material had been attached to the *Mahābhārata* before the *Kṛṣṇacarita* was added, and was already known as the *Harivaṃśa* because a large part of it dealt with Kṛṣṇa's ancestry.[77]

The precise manner in which the two texts came together is of no particular interest in the context of this study. What is more to the point is why the story of Kṛṣṇa's life should have come into this

central position in Vaiṣṇavism at this particular time. Couture's interpretation of *khila* in the traditional Indian sense of 'a supplement received from elsewhere for the sake of completion, fulfillment, elucidation', rather than in the Western sense of an appendix,[78] gives some indication of just how central this position was. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the *Kṛṣṇacarita* should have sprung into it from nowhere. The fact that the *Bālacarita*, a play attributed to Bhāsa, and regarded by Hardy as belonging 'to the second to fourth century AD',[79] appears to be based on a different account of Kṛṣṇa's childhood[80] again suggests that by Kuṣāṇa times the story of Kṛṣṇa was old enough to have branched out into different versions. Why then did it take this story so long to appear within the mainstream of Vaiṣṇava tradition?

A clue to the answer may be found in the *Sabhāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. One of the kings present at Yudhiṣṣhira's *rājasūya*, Śiśupāla of the Cedis, objects to Bhīṣma's decision to confer the foremost guest gift upon Kṛṣṇa (2.33.31b–2). He tries to belittle Kṛṣṇa in various ways, one of them being a denigratory account of the latter's youthful exploits (2.38.5–15) culminating in a reference to him as 'a cow-killer and woman-killer' (*goghnaḥ strīghnaū ca*, v. 15). This description of Kṛṣṇa's youth contains slighting allusions to many of the episodes included in the *Harivaṃśa*: Kṛṣṇa's killing of Keśin (*aśva*, V.7), his overturning of the cart (v.8), his holding up of the 'ant-hill-sized' (*valmīkamātraḥ*, v.9) Mt Govardhana and eating a lot of food at the top of the mountain (v. 10), and his slaying of Kaṃsa (v. 11). The epithets of 'cow-killer' and 'woman-killer' appear to refer to his killing of Pūtanā and Ariṣṣa, already mentioned along with Keśin in v.7. The order in which these events are mentioned is not that of the *Harivaṃśa*, and it is therefore unlikely that the composers of the Epic have this in mind when they give these words to Śiśupāla. But without doubt this passage suggests familiarity with stories of Kṛṣṇa's youthful days as a cowherd, and Śiśupāla's sneering dismissal of them may represent the light in which they were once regarded by some leaders of the brāhmaṇical establishment. It may well have been that such stories, cherished and transmitted by nomadic cattle-rearing tribes, well outside the main spheres of brāhmaṇical tradition, were mostly unknown in those spheres for centuries and not much valued at first when they became known.[81]

However, the opening up of trade with the Mediterranean world and Central Asia which followed from the rule of foreign kings in north-west and western India, the Indo-Greeks, the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas, led to an increase in the prosperity and influence of the merchant classes.[82] It may well have been this rise of one branch of

the *vaiśya* class which created a climate in which stories of a divine hero who grew up in another branch became welcome rather than distasteful, particularly in view of the fact that the Ābhīras are generally seen as living in the north-west and western regions.

Certainly the *Harivaṃśa* contains a story in which the values of all three branches of the *vaiśya* class (agriculture, trade and animal-rearing) are set out forcefully. This is the episode, given an important position among Kṛṣṇa's youthful exploits by the *Harivaṃśa*, but almost completely ignored by the *Bālacarita*, in which the young Kṛṣṇa diverts to himself the sacrifice intended for Indra, and protects the cowherd community from the latter's consequent wrath (*Hv* 59–62). It begins with Kṛṣṇa asking the cowherd elders about the feast which they are preparing to celebrate. When told that it is in honour of Indra, the lord of the gods (*sureśa*ṃ, 59.18), who is worshipped by all kings and by all other men including the herders, Kṛṣṇa bursts out in protest against this:

> 20 Herdsman, we are forest-dwelling herdsmen, living on the wealth of our cows. Know this, divinity for us is our cows, the mountains and the forests. 21 Agriculture is the livelihood of farmers, trade is the livelihood of merchants, for us the cow is our supreme livelihood; this is what is called the threefold [*vaiśya* livelihood]. The skill upon which one concentrates is one's highest divinity. 22 He who gains benefits from one [divinity] and performs ceremonies for another receives a double misfortune, both in this life and the next … 27 Brahmins are intent upon the sacrifices of *mantras*, farmers upon the sacrifices of the furrow. The mountain sacrifices are for us cowherds; we should worship the mountain in the forest (20 *vaya*ṃ *vanācarā gopa gopā godhanajīvinaḥ / gāvo 'smad daivata*ṃ *viddhi girayaś ca vanāni ca* // 21 *karṣakāṇāṃ kṚṣir vṚttiḥ paṇya*ṃ *vipaṇijīvinām / asmāka*ṃ *gauḥ parā vṚttir etat traividhyam ucyate / vidyayā yo yayā yuktas tasya sā daivata*ṃ *param* // 22 *yo 'nyasya phalam aśnānaḥ karoty anyasya satkriyām / dvāv anarthau sa labhate pretya ceha ca mānavaḥ* // … 27 *mantrayajñaparā viprāḥ sītāyajñāś ca karṣakāḥ / giriyajñā vaya*ṃ *gopā ijyo 'smābhir girir varie* // 59.20–2,27)

This is not to say that the Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivaṃśa* should be seen as inciting *vaiśyas* to rise against their *kṣatriya* masters or patrons. Not only does the Govardhana episode end with Kṛṣṇa and Indra firm friends, but when Kṛṣṇa does eventually rise against Kaṃsa, it is because he is a tyrant, not because he is a *kṣatriya*. Indeed, in the second part of his story Kṛṣṇa himself takes up his rightful position as a leading member of a *kṣatriya* clan. Nevertheless, his speech in *Hv* 59 would be heard gladly, by more than its immediate audience in the story, as a resounding statement of *vaiśya* values.[83]

The idea of a deity who embraces such values accords well with the democratisation of religion brought about by the development of *bhakti* between the time of the Mauryas and that of the Guptas (roughly 200 BCE–300 CE). The Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* had already declared that ‘women, *vaiśyas*, even *śūdras*’ (*striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās*, *BhG* 9.32) were eligible to be his worshippers.[84] Now in the *Harivaṃśa* Kṛṣṇa himself lives as a young *vaiśya*, even though he is a

kṣatriya by birth. This marks the culmination of the process which Dandekar calls 'the Kṛṣṇaisation of Viṣṇu'.[85] From now on the image of the young cowherd dominates the Vaiṣṇava imagination more and more. The *Bhagavadgītā* as the teaching of the *kṣatriya* sage remains influential. But at the level of the imagination and the emotions it is Rāma who comes to be seen as God's representative in *kṣatriya* terms.[86] The figure of Kṛṣṇa gains a more universal appeal than this, by incorporating *vaiśya* as well as *kṣatriya* elements into his story.[87]

2. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*

In discussions of the date of the *Viṣṇu* the story in 3.17–18 of how Viṣṇu subverted the *asuras* into Buddhist and Jain doctrines has featured prominently. F. E. Pargiter believed that the *purāṇa* could not be earlier than the fifth century CE, on the grounds that 'from its account of Buddhism and Jainism … it appears to have been composed after brahmanism has recovered its supremacy'.[88] For R. C. Hazra, this account was 'most probably interpolated at a later date', and his own estimate put the *Viṣṇu* somewhere 'in the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth century AD'.[89]

The story told in *Viṣṇu* 3.17.9–18.4 is interesting in that its structure is the familiar mythological one of an episode in the perpetual war between the *devas* and the *asuras*, yet within that structure there are hints of a historical situation which has been incorporated into the myth. It opens with the defeated gods laying their problems before Viṣṇu on the northern shore of the Ocean of Milk. They explain that they cannot prevail against the Daityas, because the latter are too faithful to the practices and precepts of the Veda. Viṣṇu takes action on their behalf and gives them an illusory form (*māyāmoham*, 3.17.41) which will go before them to encounter the *asuras*. This illusory form in fact takes more than one shape and proclaims various non-Vedic doctrines: the Jain *syādvāda* in 3.18.2–12, Buddhist teachings in vvl5–19, and other unacceptable ideas in v.23. The result of all this is that the *asuras* abandon the Veda completely, thus rendering themselves vulnerable to defeat by the *devas* (vv32–4).

Wendy O'Flaherty has pointed to this story as 'a significant example' of the way in which purāṇic texts of the Gupta period deal with heretics, and particularly with Buddhists.[90] It is, moreover, not the only passage in the *Viṣṇu* in which there is implied criticism of Buddhist views or a hint that Vaiṣṇavas are their moral equals, if not superiors: e.g. 1.6.29–31, which describes 'those in whose consciousness the spot of sin created by time developed' (*yeṣāṃ tu*

*kālas*Ṛṣṣo *'sau pāpabindur … / cetaḥsu vavrddhe …*, v.29) as abandoning the Vedas and the sacrificial system;[91] Prahlāda's ethical teaching, which shows that followers of Viṣṇu are exponents of the main Buddhist virtues;[92] Viṣṇu's offer of *nirvāṇa* to Prahlāda in 1.20.28, which declares that Vaiṣṇavas too can attain the supreme Buddhist goal.[93] Such passages suggest that Hazra was mistaken in trying to isolate 3.17–18 from the rest of the text as a later and atypical interpolation: 'these texts of the Gupta period were weapons in a battle between the instigators of the Hindu revival and the still thriving establishment of Jainism and Buddhism'.[94]

Indeed the *Viṣṇu* as a whole seems to have been intended by its composers as a powerful instrument of this Hindu revival. It proclaims the power of Viṣṇu as the Supreme Being, and his presence in various forms throughout the universe. The figure of Viṣṇu combines Vedic resonances with the newer appeal of *bhakti*, according well with the tendencies of the Gupta kings, who 'used the mystique of the Vedic rituals and symbolism to legitimate their authority' while showing a personal preference for Vaiṣṇavism.[95] Frederick M. Asher has seen the Udayagiri relief of Varāha raising the earth from the cosmic waters as 'a remarkable allegory for the unification of the empire under Candra Gupta II'.[96] It would not be too far-fetched to see the *Viṣṇu*'s whole picture of the cosmos as an allegory, in Asher's sense,[97] for the wide expanse of Gupta rule.

To return to the story in *Viṣṇu* 3.17–18, however, this could well be, far from an interpolation, a key to understanding the whole *purāṇa*. Scholars who have examined the *Viṣṇu*, from Wilson to Rocher, have been struck by the fact that there is little emphasis in it upon any particular region or location. As Rocher says, they 'seem to be resigned to the belief that absence of *māhātmyas* or descriptions of *tīrthas* make it nearly impossible to determine the place of origin of the purāṇa'.[98] Yet there is one location which appears to have a particular significance for the *Viṣṇu*. When the deceiving illusion first approaches the Daityas they have 'resorted to the banks of the Narmadā' (*narmadātīrasaṃśritān*, 3.18.1) to practise asceticism. This is not the first time that the *Viṣṇu* has mentioned the Narmadā. In 1.2.8–9 the narrator Parāśara, having told his questioner Maitreya of how he acquired the knowledge which he is about to impart, explains that this *purāṇa* was transmitted to him from Brahmā via 'Dakṣa and other excellent sages' (*dakṣyādair munisattamaiḥ*), who told it to 'Purukutsa who reigned on the banks of the Narmadā' (*purukutsāya bhubuje narmadātaṣe*)[99] who passed it on to Sārasvata.[100]

This reference to the Narmadā may point not only to the region in which the *Viṣṇu* originated, but to a more specific date for its

composition than anything so far suggested. Towards the end of the fourth century Candra Gupta II married his daughter Prabhāvatī Guptā to Rudrasena II, king of the Vākāṣakas (d.390 CE), and then went on to annex the kingdom of the Śaka-Kṣatrapa dynasty in Gujarat. This annexation must have occurred shortly before 409 CE, because in that year the coins of the Śaka king Rudrasimha III, bearing a Buddhist *vihāra*, were replaced by Candra Gupta's coins bearing the image of Garuḍa.[101] These moves made the Narmadā the southern boundary of the western part of the Gupta empire, with the Vākāṣakas allies on the other side of the river. The *Viṣṇu* may have been compiled as a kind of Vaiṣṇava Bible, marking the retreat of Buddhism and Jainism, and offering the Guptas a vision of the cosmos, which was at once an image of their empire and a celebration of Viṣṇu as Supreme Being. This was a vision, moreover, which could claim the utmost antiquity, going back to Vedic origins. There are therefore no 'sectarial acts'[102] described in the *Viṣṇu* because the worship and the world-view which it sets out are presented as part of the very fabric of the universe, in existence since creation.

It may seem overbold to claim that 'the banks of the Narmadā' provides such a precise answer to the questions of the *Viṣṇu*'s date and provenance. The full substantiation of such a claim would require deeper and more detailed research than this study can offer. Yet an origin in Western India in the early years of the fifth century CE has nothing unlikely about it, nor has the idea that it was intended to provide the Gupta empire with a religious vision in accordance with the Vaiṣṇava sympathies of its rulers.

3. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*

This is by far the best-known of the three texts, and its date and provenance have given rise to much discussion. As far as its date is concerned, Rocher gives a list of twenty which he knows have been assigned to it.[103] They range from 1000 BCE at the head of his list[104] to 1200–1300 CE at the end of it.[105] The latter date is connected with the idea current among pandits in Colebrooke's time that the *Bhāgavata* was the work of the grammarian Vopadeva who flourished under the patronage of Hemādri, a minister of the Yādava kings of Devagiri in the northern Deccan some time between 1260 and 1309.[106] However, such a late date would not only fail to account for the fact that Madhva, roughly contemporary with Vopadeva, regarded the *Bhāgavata* as authoritative, but would be difficult, if not impossible, to hold in view of the fact that the *Bhāgavata* is mentioned by al-Bīrūnī, writing c.1030 CE, as one of the *mahāpurāṇas* found in a list in the *Viṣṇu*. The *Bhāgavata*'s presence in this list counters also

another argument which has sometimes been used as evidence of a late date: the fact that Rāmānuja (traditionally dated 1017–1137) does not mention the *Bhāgavata*, whereas he quotes frequently from the *Viṣṇu*.[107]

Al-Bīrūnī's list seems to be the only generally accepted *terminus ad quem* for the *Bhāgavata*, and would mean that it must almost certainly have been composed not much later than the middle of the tenth century CE for it to be accepted as a *mahāpurāṇa* by 1030 CE.[108] At the other end of the scale there is no such precise *terminus a quo*, but it would seem unlikely, to say the least, that the *Bhāgavata* should predate the Āḻvār movement in South India or even be contemporary with its beginnings. This would rule out any date which was earlier than the ninth century CE. Hardy's suggestion of 'the ninth or earlier tenth century'[109] seems to be as near to the date of the *Bhāgavata* as it is possible to arrive.

The southern provenance of the *Bhāgavata* has long been recognised. Writing in 1925, C. V. Vaidya pointed out that in the description of Balarāma's *tīrthayātrā* in *Bhāgavata* 10.79, more attention is paid to the sacred places of South India than in comparable passages in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Skanda*. He also remarked upon the reference in 11.5.40 to the devotees of Vāsudeva who, in the *kaliyuga* would drink the waters of five holy rivers of the South, and the story told in 4.28.29–42 of the Pāṇḍya king Malayadhvaja, who became the ancestor of the seven Dravidian royal dynasties before eventually attaining release.[110]

With Hardy's thorough discussion in his *Viraha-bhakti* (1983) of the relationship between the language and themes of Āḻvār poetry and the *gopī* songs of Book 10, the southern provenance of the *Bhāgavata* has become firmly established. Besides his main argument, Hardy also provides an appendix which gives five other pointers to a southern origin.[111] Three of these are the passages remarked by Vaidya, and Hardy adds to 4.28.29–42 two other stories from Book 8: 8.4.7–10, in which the elephant king rescued by Hari is said to have formerly been a Pāṇḍya king named Indradyumna, and 8.24.12–13, where the Manu who is rescued by the Fish is said to have been a Pāṇḍya king named Satyavrata, and the tiny fish begins its growth in a southern river, the KṚtāmālā. The two other evidences of South Indian origin which Hardy discusses are the *Bhāgavata*'s knowledge of the distinctively southern myth in which Kṛṣṇa defeats seven bulls (10.58.32–53; 10.83.13–14), and 'indications of a Tamil substratum'[112] in 10.3.22, 10.31.19, 10.79.14 and 10.87.18, where words which have presented problems to translators and lexicographers are elucidated by a knowledge of Tamil.

T.J. Hopkins concludes his 'The Social Teaching of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'[113] with what he calls 'a sketchy but useful picture of the devotional movement represented by the *Bhāgavata*'.[114] As Hopkins sees it, the movement was characterised by 'praise of poverty and compassion for the distressed',[115] and mainly composed of 'members of the depressed urban classes', led by 'scholarly ascetics … who … may or may not have been Brahmans'.[116] He makes no attempt to state exactly the urban centre to which the movement belonged, but suggests that it was 'in the Tamil country', during 'the reigns of the Pāṇḍyas and Pallavas, when Vaiṣṇavism enjoyed real patronage …'.[117] Such a description might seem to point to Madurai or Kāñcīpuram as the *Bhāgavata*'s place of origin, with Madurai, the centre of the Pāṇḍya kingdom, as the more likely of the two. Hardy shows that the Āḻvārs upon whom the *Bhāgavata* draws were mainly those from the Pāṇḍya region,[118] and places its composition 'somewhere in the Pāṇṣiya-nāṣu'.[119]

Much of Hopkins' description of the devotional movement which produced the *Bhāgavata* reads convincingly, yet it is hard to believe that its composers thought of themselves as writing simply for the kind of movement which Hopkins describes. From the start they appear to be claiming the attention of a much wider circle, in ways which will be described in Chapter 6. They may be critical of Vedic orthodoxy, but they identify themselves closely with the Vedas and with other prestigious Sanskrit texts, while regarding themselves as free to reinterpret them in their own way.[120] One has the impression that this is a text which from its origin set out to achieve pan-Indian status.

Although there is so much evidence for the *Bhāgavata*'s southern provenance, it is perhaps not too fanciful to speculate that it was in fact composed in the north, as the work of a group which had migrated from the south to establish itself there. The beginnings of the Cōḻa ascendancy in the early tenth century may have provided the setting for such a scenario. The Cōḻas were Śaiva in their sympathies, and in 907 their first important ruler, Parantaka I, came to power, ten years after his father Āditya had defeated his Pallava overlord. During the tenth century the power of the Cōḻas extended into other regions of the south, including that of the Pāṇḍyas, and even as far as Sri Lanka and the Maldives.[121] It is possible that early in the tenth century a group of Pāṇḍya brahmins who were devoted to Kṛṣṇa decided to migrate to some area further north, away from this Śaiva influence, and that they then set out to incorporate within the culture of their adopted region the values and world-view of their southern home.

This is, of course, pure speculation. There is no obvious candidate for this 'adopted region', and there are no anti-Śaiva tendencies in the text.[122] Nevertheless, the idea that the *Bhāgavata* originated with a self-exiled southern group who lived somewhere in the north would be in keeping with its particular blend of Sanskrit and Tamil qualities, and with the various changes, noted by Hardy, which it makes to its Tamil material in order to make it acceptable to a non-Tamil audience.[123] This could also account for Rāmānuja's neglect of the *Bhāgavata*, as well as for its presence in al-Bīrūnī's northern list of *mahāpurāṇas*.

A final point needs to be made about the composition of all three texts. As *purāṇas* they belong to a genre which was originally oral. Composing a text would mean drawing upon a repertoire of stories, epithets and descriptions, and making variations in their order, wording and content as appropriate to the audience and the situation. A *purāṇa* of any length would take several days to recite, so this would allow time for questions to arise from the audience which would be answered in the next episode, perhaps by the introduction of new explanatory elements into the story.

Yet from early times there seems to have been a tendency towards the preservation of *purāṇas* in written form.[124] This means that it is not easy to be sure exactly what processes would have been involved in the composition of the three texts under consideration. The complexity of structure of the *Bhāgavata* and the deliberate archaism of its language suggest very strongly that this was a written document from the beginning. Whether this is also true of the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* is less likely, but may be the case, even though the material which they have brought together once circulated orally.

In the face of such uncertainties I have decided to refer to 'composers' or 'compilers' of these three texts, rather than to a composer or compiler of each one,[125] in order to indicate that I see the texts as products of group traditions rather than of single authors, while allowing for the possibility that at times members of the group showed their creativity not only by their skill in compilation but also in the invention of new stories. I have also referred throughout to the hearer/reader of these *purāṇas*, which, whether originally oral or written, were all intended for public recitation rather than for private reading. In the chapters which follow, both kinds of creativity will be encountered in the exploration of these three texts. The ambiguity of Kṛṣṇa's position, as both actor and role in the *avatāra* drama, will give plenty of scope for differing interpretations and perspectives, which will be sought first of all in the *Mahābhārata* to which the *Harivaṃśa* is attached, and then in each of the texts in turn.

Chapter Two

Epic evaluations of Kṛṣṇa[1]

The *Harivaṃśa* is a transitional text.[2] It acts as a hinge which holds together the epic-purāṇic diptych of Kṛṣṇa. In the epic picture he is somewhat aloof from the actions which determine the world's course, although mysteriously in control of them, the warrior who does not fight, the householder who announces a new way of renunciation; in the purāṇic picture he is central to all action, both as victim and victor, although he alternates between concealing and revealing his divine power. In both pictures he is more than a human hero.

The *Harivaṃśa's* transitional character lies partly in its relation to the *Mahābhārata*, since it is both continuous and discontinuous with it. It affirms its continuity by using the same two pairs of interlocutors as those who are found in the frame-narratives of the *Mahābhārata*: Sūta and Śūta, Vaiśaṃpāyana and Janamejaya. It asserts its discontinuity by adding something radically new: the complete story of Kṛṣṇa, from his birth at Mathurā, through his childhood and youth among the forest-dwelling cowherds, to his triumph in Dvārakā as a mature warrior and statesman.

The very fact that the *Harivaṃśa* is regarded as a supplement to the *Mahābhārata* is itself a sign of discontinuity. For centuries new material had been added to the Epic, simply by being incorporated into the main text. A new story could be told by some Ṛṣi in the forest, or additional teaching could be put into the mouth of Bhīṣma on his battlefield deathbed. It is conceivable that Kṛṣṇa's story could have been inserted into the main body of the Epic at some such suitable point, just as the story of Rāma has been included in Book 3.[3] But whereas other material had left the *Mahābhārata*'s core in its central position, this story was too important for those who told it, too

attractive for those who heard it and too close to the core narrative to be incorporated into any existing framework, even one so seemingly all-encompassing as that of the *Mahābhārata*. If Kṛṣṇa's story was to be told it must be heard in its own right, not as a subsidiary episode in the story of the Pāṇḍavas. Yet it must be connected with their story, because Kṛṣṇa was so firmly linked with them. Thus it was logical for it to be presented as a supplement, new and self-contained but closely connected with the Epic.[4]

In the present chapter the *Harivaṃśa* will first be regarded as continuous with the *Mahābhārata*, and its presentation of the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu will be seen as one of several such presentations within the Epic. Then the unique contribution of the *Harivaṃśa* will be examined in some detail, leading into Chapter 3's exploration of the *Kṛṣṇacarita* which makes up the bulk of its text as constituted by the Critical Edition.

KṚṢṆA AND VIṢṆU IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

Within the *Mahābhārata* as a whole (including the *Harivaṃśa*) Kṛṣṇa is seen in a variety of perspectives. There are passages where he is presented as purely human: in 13.13–17, for instance, where he seeks boons from Śiva, or in the Syamantaka episode of *Hv* 28–9 which will be considered at a later stage in this chapter.[5] Such passages, however, are too few and too atypical of the text as a whole to represent the view of any significant strand within the Epic. For the most part Kṛṣṇa is seen as divine in some sense or another, either (i) as Supreme God in his own right, regardless of whether he is identified with Viṣṇu or not, or (ii) as one of several forms adopted by Viṣṇu, a role played out within what later came to be seen as the *avatāra* sequence, or (iii) as part of a general scenario in which he embodies Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa while other characters embody other deities or *asuras*. These three perspectives will all be examined before turning to the *Harivaṃśa*'s own particular blending of them in order to show Kṛṣṇa in its own particular light.

Kṛṣṇa as Supreme God (*BhG* 4.5–8; *Mbh* 3.187.126–30; 7.28.22–6)

The question of whether the *Bhagavadgītā* is more appropriately seen as an independent text or as an integral part of the *Mahābhārata* has been much debated,[6] but its crucial position in the narrative as it

stands cannot be doubted. It addresses the issues of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, effecting a reconciliation between the values of Vedic society and those of the renouncer.[7] Nevertheless the *Gītā* stands out from the rest of the *Mahābhārata* in depicting Kṛṣṇa as a teacher of wisdom who offers a way of salvation,[8] and it is here above all that he speaks as God in his own right. In *BhG* 4.5–8 he tells Arjuna:

> 5 I have had many former births, Arjuna, as you have had too. I know them all, whereas you do not know them, foe-destroyer. 6 Although I am the unborn and eternal Self, although I am the lord of [all] creatures, I direct the *prakṚti* which is my own and am born by my own creative power. 7 Whenever *dharma* is in decline, ? Bhārata, and *adharma* is increasing, then I bring myself forth. 8 In order to rescue the good and destroy the evildoers, and for the sake of establishing *dharma*, I am born from age to age (5 *bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna / tāny ahaṃ veda sarvāṇi na tvaṃ vettha paraṃtapa //* 6 *ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā bhūtānām īśvaro 'pi san / prakṚtiṃ svām adhiṣṣhāya sambhavāmy ātmamāyayā //* 7 *yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata / abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṚjāmy aham //* 8 *paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṚtām / dharmasaṣsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge //*)

There is no suggestion here that Kṛṣṇa is describing himself as the manifestation of some higher deity. He is himself the uncreated and eternal Lord of all beings, who brings himself to birth by his own power (v.6).

It may be objected that these words are simply spoken by the supreme Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa who has assumed the form of Kṛṣṇa, yet there is little to support this within the *Gītā* itself. The name 'Nārāyaṇa' does not occur at all in it, and the name 'Viṣṇu' occurs three times only. The first time is in 10.21, where Kṛṣṇa declares 'Among the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu' (*ādityānām ahaṃ viṣṇur*). This is the first of a series of statements in which Kṛṣṇa, having declared that he is the Self within all beings, goes on to say that the foremost member of each class of beings is specially representative of him. It cannot therefore be taken to mean 'I am Viṣṇu's manifestation'. Rather it means 'Viṣṇu is my manifestation as an Āditya', just as 'Śaṃkara is my manifestation as a Rudra' (*rudrāṇāṃ śaṃkaraś cāsmi*, 10.23) or 'Vāsudeva is my manifestation as a Vṛṣṇi' (*vṛṣṇīnāṃ vāsudevo 'smi*, 10.37). The other two occurrences of 'Viṣṇu' in the *Gītā* are in Chapter 11. Overwhelmed by the appearance of Kṛṣṇa's cosmic form, Arjuna describes to him what he sees, and twice addresses him as 'Viṣṇu'. But Kṛṣṇa himself gives no indication that this name is specially appropriate. When he identifies himself he says 'I am Time full-grown, bringing about the world's destruction' (*kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṚt pravṚddho*, 11.32).

Although it is perhaps going too far to say with van Buitenen that 'if God's name is Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa is not aware of it',[9] nevertheless Viṣṇu appears to be no more than one possible name of the Supreme God whose chief name is Kṛṣṇa. It is therefore inappropriate to regard *BhG*

11 as the moment of revelation in which Kṛṣṇa is shown to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu.

Even so, the *Gītā* recognises an identity of sorts between the two. When Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to show him his familiar form again, he describes it in terms which are traditionally associated with Viṣṇu:

> I wish to see you again wearing your diadem, holding mace and discus. Appear in your four-armed form, ? thousand-armed one containing all forms (*kirīṣinam gadinaṃ cakrahastam icchāmi tvāṃ draṣṣum ahaṃ tathaiva / tenaiva rūpeṇa caturbhujena sahasrabāho bhava viśvamūrte* // 11.46)

The fact that Kṛṣṇa is described here as holding only mace and discus could be taken to support the variant *bhujadvayena*. But whether he is two-armed or four-armed, the mace, discus and diadem common to both the form which he has just revealed (11.17) and to his 'ordinary' form (11.46) would be enough to connect him with Viṣṇu. However, this connection does not mean that Kṛṣṇa is in any sense a lower manifestation of Viṣṇu, or subordinate to him in any way. The form of Viṣṇu is simply one of many which he contains within himself. He is the supreme deity whose true nature transcends Viṣṇu rather than manifesting him, and it is his own concern for *dharma*, not Viṣṇu's, which leads him to appear on earth at critical moments when *adharma* is in the ascendancy. The general drift of *BhG* 4.5–8 suggests that these appearances take the form of human life-times. There is no indication as to what form the restoration of *dharma* takes, or as to precisely who are the good to be rescued or the evildoers to be punished.

The language of *BhG* 4.7–8 occurs at other points also in the *Mahābhārata*. In 3.186-7 Mārkaṇḍeya tells the Pāṇḍavas, in the presence of Kṛṣṇa and Nārada (3.180.40–5), of his vision of a child asleep upon a banyan leaf in the midst of the cosmic ocean — a child within whose body the sage finds the whole universe.[10] This child, whom Mārkaṇḍeya later identifies with Kṛṣṇa, says:

> 26 Whenever *dharma* is in decline, O best of men, and *adharma* is increasing, then I bring myself forth. 27 When Daityas, delighting in violence, whom the best of the gods cannot slay, and fierce *rākṣasas* arise in this world, 28 then I am born in the homes of the virtuous. Entering into a human body, I subdue everything. 29 Having created gods, humans, *gandharvas*, serpents, *rākṣasas* and inanimate creatures, I destroy them by my own power. 30 When it is the time for action, I think of a body once more and bring myself forth, entering into a human body in order to hold the boundaries firm (26 *yadā yadā ca dharmasya glānir bhavati sattama / abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṚjāmy aham* // 27 *daityā hiṃsānuraktāś ca avadhyāḥ surasattamaiḥ / rākṣasaś cāpi loke 'smin yadotpatsyanti dāruṇāḥ* // 28 *tadāhaṃ saṃprasūyāmi gṚheṣu śubhakarmaṇām / praviṣṣo mānuṣaṃ dehaṃ sarvaṃ praśamayāmy aham* // 29 *sṚṣṣvā devamanuṣyāṃś ca gandharvoragarākṣasān / sthāvarāṇi ca bhūtāni saṃharāmy ātmamāyayā* // 30 *karmakāle punar deham anucintya sṚjāmy aham / praviśya mānuṣaṃ dehaṃ maryādābandhakāraṇāt* // 3.187.26–30)

Reminiscences of the *Gītā* are found also in 13.143.11, where Kṛṣṇa's role in relation to *dharma* is being explained by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṣhira: 'When *dharma* declines for the gods, then Kṛṣṇa is born among men' (*yadā dharmo glāyati vai surāṇām tadā kṛṣṇaḥ jāyate mānuṣeṣu*). In 14.53.13, Kṛṣṇa tells Uttaṅka that he takes birth 'in order to protect *dharma* and establish it' (*dharmasaṃrakṣanārthāya dharmasaṃsthāpanāya ca*). Again he uses the image of maintaining boundaries: 'I set the limit of *dharma* while the *yugas* move on and on' (*dharmasya setuṃ badhnāmi calite calite yuge*, v. 15).

These passages interpret Kṛṣṇa's restoration of *dharma* in terms of the conflict between the gods and the *asuras* (3.187.27), and speak of his births mainly as human (3.187.28,30; 13.143.11).[11] Moreover they all specify that it is Kṛṣṇa, rather than Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, who is concerned for *dharma* and assumes forms in order to rescue it. This is perhaps even more emphatically stated in 7.28.22–6, where Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna: 'In four forms I am perpetually engaged in protecting the world' (*caturmūrtir ahaṃ śaśval lokatrāṇārtham udyataḥ*, v.23). His first form performs *tapas*, and his second looks at the world's good and evil deeds (v.24), while the third itself performs deeds (v.25a). The fourth form sleeps for a thousand years and, upon awakening, bestows boons upon those who deserve them (v.25b).[12] In all these passages Kṛṣṇa is as it were on the divine side of the equation, as he is in the *Gītā*: he is the one who acts in other forms on the world's behalf, not a form in whom some higher power is acting.

It would seem therefore that the idea of the Supreme God entering his own world to perform salvific deeds was originally connected with Kṛṣṇa rather than with any other component of the Vaiṣṇava deity. Yet this is not to deny that there are stories in the *Mahābhārata* relating to Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa which have contributed to the *avatāra* myth and helped it to develop in such a way that Kṛṣṇa could be given a subordinate place within its framework. These stories must now be considered.

Kṛṣṇa as a form adopted by Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa

In order to bring the *Mahābhārata*'s evaluations of Kṛṣṇa into clearer focus it is necessary to distinguish between (a) the Epic as a whole and (b & c) two of its latest parts, the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (*Mbh* 12.321–39) and *Hv* 30–1, which have distinctive ideas on this subject. **In the *Mahābhārata* as a whole** there are many passing references to Viṣṇu's changes of shape. For the most part they do not imply the concern for *dharma* or for humanity's welfare which is characteristic of the *avatāra* idea. In 3.299.10–19 Dhaumya, the Pāṇḍavas' priest, is

encouraging the royal brothers as they prepare for their year in disguise, by reminding them that even gods and Ṛṣi*s* have had to adopt such strategies. Among other examples he cites Viṣṇu's going into hiding as Aśvaśiras (v.12), assuming the shape of a dwarf (v. 13) and living as Daśaratha's son (v.19). Vāmana is mentioned also in 3.81.86–7, 6.63.13, 12.200.26–7 and 13.14.25, and Rāma Dāśarathi in 3.147.28.

There are traces also of some of the other forms of Viṣṇu which later become part of the *daśāvatāra* sequence. The boar form is noted in 1.19.11, 3.81.15, 6.61.47, 6.63.13 and 12.202.28, and the lion form (presumably a reference to Narasiṃha) in 6.63.13 and 7.164.146. Besides these, Viṣṇu's appearance as Kapila is mentioned (3.45.25; 3.106.2), and as the woman who deceives the *asuras* in the episode of the churning of the ocean (1.16.39). He is also identified with Kuvalāśva in 3.195.12 and with PṚthu in 12.59.130, but both cases seem to involve his possession of an existing individual rather than the creation of a special form.

The one instance in which Viṣṇu's adoption of forms is declared to have a salvific purpose is that mentioned in 3.100.19–21, when the gods remind Nārāyaṇa Vaikuṇṣha of how he has saved the world in the past by appearing in it as Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana (linked together also in 6.63.13). Yet even here this reference to the saving deeds of the past does not lead into another saving act on Nārāyaṇa's part: he advises the gods to have recourse to Agastya, who will swallow up the ocean in which their current foes are hiding (3.101.10).

There is only one reference to Kṛṣṇa as a form adopted by Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa: in 1.189.31 he and his brother Baladeva are said to originate from two hairs, one white and the other black which Hari plucked from his head. Although this story will be encountered again in the *Viṣṇu*, in the *Mahābhārata* it is overshadowed by the idea of Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu's *aṃśa*, and Baladeva as Śeṣa's, which will be examined later in this chapter.

The forms of Nārāyaṇa **in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (*Mbh* 12.321–39)** are particularly interesting. The *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* is generally acknowledged to be one of the latest sections in the *Mahābhārata*. Even Madeleine Biardeau, who finds most text-historical questions irrelevant to the *'logique du mythe'* which is her concern, says in a footnote that she is aware of 'whiffs of sectarianism' (*relents sectaires*) in the *Nārāyaṇīya* which, she implies, distinguish it from the main body of the *Mahābhārata*.[13] Anne-Marie Esnoul, in the introduction to her French translation of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*, dates it towards the end of the third century CE, 'which would make it more or less

contemporary with the *Harivaṃśa*'.[14] In view of this comparatively late date and the fact that the *Nārāyaṇīya* refers to 'the *Mahābhārata*' as though this is something other than itself (*Mbh* 12.327.18), it is not surprising that it should have its own theological viewpoint, and that some of its ideas and vocabulary should have affinities with parts of the *Harivaṃśa*.

The *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* describes a visit paid by the Ṛṣi Nārada to Śvetadvīpa, the 'white island-continent' which lies to the north of the Ocean of Milk (12.322.8; 12.323.23),[15] 32,000 *yojanas* from Mt Meru (12.322.8). This is a land of dazzling brightness, 'the abode of brilliance' (*tejonivāsa*ḥ, 12.323.34), inhabited by *bhaktas* of Nārāyaṇa who are able to 'see' their Lord, but not with ordinary eyesight, since they are said to be 'beyond the senses' (*atīndriyāś* …, 12.322.9). Nārada is granted a glimpse of Nārāyaṇa 'in his cosmic form' (*viśvarūpadhṚk*, 12.326.1), but he is also aware that there are other forms in which Nārāyaṇa shows himself. His most important forms are presented in three sets of four,[16] and in all these sets the name Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva appears. The first four to be mentioned are the sons of Dharma: Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari and Kṛṣṇa (12.321.8–9). Hari and Kṛṣṇa never appear on the scene, but Nārada meets Nara and Nārāyaṇa in the hermitage at Badari,[17] where they are spending their time in *tapas*. These four are the Supreme Nārāyaṇa's 'best forms' (*tanava*ḥ *śreṣṣhā*, 12.326.13).

The second fourfold form of God gives evidence of the Pāñcarātra affinities of the *Nārāyaṇīya*. In 12.326.28–40 the Supreme Nārāyaṇa explains to Nārada the processes by which the universe merges with him as the eternal actionless Puruṣa Vāsudeva (12.326.31) and then issues forth from him again. When the five elements come together to constitute his body, he enters into it as Śeṣa Saṃkarṣaṇa, the individual soul (*jīva*, v.35). From Saṃkarṣaṇa emerges Pradyumna, mind (*manas*, v.36),[18] and from Pradyumna emerges the creator Aniruddha (v.37) who is identified with *ahaṃkāra* in v.39. Of these four *vyūha* forms, it is Aniruddha who plays the most active part in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. He is not the ultimate origin of all things, but the maker of creatures, through the agency of Brahmā (12.326.37; 327.25b–26), as well as being the cosmic Hayaśiras who rescues the Vedas from Madhu and Kaiṣabha (12.335) and thus allows creation to proceed.[19]

It is in the third fourfold form of the Supreme God, designated as *prādurbhāva*,[20] that the concern for *dharma* comes again to the fore. The Lord (*bhagavān*) infuses Brahmā with his own wisdom (12.337.23–5), thus enabling him to perform the work of creation. Then it occurs to him that the Daityas, Dānavas and others created by

Brahmā are burdening Earth and making her weak. Some of them, he foresees, will obtain power through their *tapas*, and torment gods and Ṛṣi*s* so that from time to time he will have to remove Earth's load 'by various appearances in succession upon the earth' (*nānāsamudbhūtair vasudhāyāṃ yathākramam*, 12.337.32) — besides upholding the earth continually as 'the serpent dwelling in Pātāla' (*pātālasthena bhoginā*, 12.337.33):

> 35 And thinking thus Lord Madhusūdana emitted several forms for the production of his manifestations: 36 those of a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf and a human being, [saying] 'With these I shall destroy the gods' wicked enemies' (35 *evaṣ sa cintayitvā tu bhagavān madhusūdanaḥ / rūpāṇy anekāny asṚjat prādurbhāvabhavāya sah // 36 vārāham nārasiṃhaṃ ca vāmanaṃ mānuṣaṃ tathā / ebhir mayā nihantavyā durvinītāḥ surārayaḥ // Mbh* 12.337.35–6)

This group of four is interesting in that it picks up the trio of boar, man-lion and dwarf from *Mbh* 3.100.19–21 and adds to it a human figure which may perhaps be Kṛṣṇa.[21] There is an earlier passage in the *Nārāyaṇīya*, 12.326.71–6, where three human forms appear in connection with this trio: first Rāma Bhārgava (12.326.77), next Rāma D ā ś arathi (12.326.78–81) and then Kṛṣṇa, 'the man from Mathurā' (*māthuraḥ*, 12.326.82–92).[22] The last two are said to appear at junctures between the *yugas*, Rāma Dāṣarathi between the Tretā and the Dvāpara (v.78) and Kṛṣṇa between the Dvāpara and the Kali.[23] In this same chapter Nārāyaṇa also mentions to Nārada his manifestations as a goose and as Hayaśiras (v.94).

In the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* therefore the forms which later come to be known as *avatāras* are one type of form among others in which the Supreme God makes himself known to his creatures. The word *prādurbhāva* which designates them in 12.326.82, 327.85,94,95, 331.40, 332.20, 337.36 is not used of any other type of manifestation. It is particularly characteristic of the *Nārāyaṇīya* and *Hv* 30–1. It is only in connection with this group of *prādurbhāva* forms that Kṛṣṇa is seen as playing the role of an *avatāra* in relation to Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa. The names of the first group of four appear to represent all aspects of the Supreme God rather than specifying precise appearances, and the second group consists of emanations which are in themselves formless, so that Aniruddha has to adopt the form of Hayaśiras in order to deal with Madhu and Kaiṣabha in 12.335.47–8.

In *Hv* 30–1 it is the *prādurbhāva* forms alone which receive attention. Chapter 30 is a request from Janamejaya for information about Viṣṇu's manifestation of himself as Kṛṣṇa (vv1–2), which shows that the questioner already knows a great deal about Viṣṇu's deeds and forms. He has 'won the worlds with three strides' (*lokān kramair jitvā tribhis*, v.9); he has absorbed the earth into the ocean, assuming

the form of water (v.10); assuming the form of a boar, he has retrieved the earth from the ocean (v.11); he has conquered the *trailokya* on Indra's behalf (v.12); he has turned himself into a man-lion and killed the leader of the Daityas (v.13); as the Aurva fire he has drunk up the world-ocean (v.14); he is the thousand-footed, thousand-rayed, thousand-headed one (v.15); when the world was nothing but ocean the supernatural (*apaṅkajam*: lit. 'not mud-born') lotus sprang from his navel (v.16); in the Tārakāmaya battle he killed Daityas, 'having assumed a form consisting of all the gods and bearing all weapons' (*sarvadevamayaṃ kṚtvā sarvāyudhadharaṃ vapuḥ*, v.17b); on Garuḍa, he killed Kālanemi (v.17c); he lay on the northern shore of the Ocean of Milk, performing yoga in the darkness (v.18); he was born from Aditi, and by his world-striding steps he restored the kingship of the gods to Indra and made the Daityas live in water (vv19–20). The most precise and easily identifiable forms which are mentioned here are again those of Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana, and the word *prādurbhāva* is not used again after v.2.

Vaiśaṃpāyana's answer to Janamejaya gives a clear list of nine easily recognisable *prādurbhāvas*: Pauṣkaraka (i.e. the slayer of Madhu and Kaiṣabha, when Brahmā appeared from the lotus in Viṣṇu's navel, vv14–20), Varāha (vv21–30), Narasiṃha (vv31–67), Vāmana (vv68–92), Dattātreya (vv93–9), Rāma Jāmadagnya (vv100–9), Rāma Dāśarathi (vv110–42)[24], Kṛṣṇa (w143–7) and Kalki (v.148). Some of their stories are told in outline only, but the Narasiṃha, Vāmana and Rāma Dāśarathi episodes are given in considerable detail, and to the brief story of Varāha is added a long description of the Boar as the cosmic symbol of sacrifice.

The list suggests that a new idea, perhaps a development of *Mbh* 12.326.71–6, is being presented to a public which has so far only a somewhat hazy impression of Viṣṇu's appearances. Moreover these appearances are firmly connected with Viṣṇu's salvific intentions for the universe. The God who is in question here is the cosmic Puruṣa, symbolising the sacrificial power which maintains the universe in being (31.3–9). Thousands of his manifestations have already gone by, and there are still more to come (31.10; cf. *Mbh* 12.326.95):

> For the welfare of gods and men and the good of the worlds, the Self of all beings actually manifests himself many times (*hitārthaṃ suramartyānāṃ lokānāṃ prabhavāya ca / bahuśaḥ sarvabhūtātmā prādurbhavati kāryataḥ // Hv* 31.13 ab)

Seen from this point of view, Kṛṣṇa is one of a series of Viṣṇu's *prādurbhāvas*, and apparently of no significance among them. He is not the climax of the list, since he is followed by Kalki, and his story is briefly summarised, without any of the detail which marks those of Narasiṃha, Vāmana or Rāma Dāśarathi. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa is dealt with

more briefly than any other *prādurbhāva* except Kalki.

The descent of the gods (*Mbh* 1.58,61;[25] *Hv* 39–45)

There is another perspective in the *Mahābhārata*, in which Kṛṣṇa is connected with Viṣṇu as part of a total pattern which gives human counterparts to a wide range of supernatural beings and links them all with the idea of *'bhārāvataraṇa'*, removing the burden.[26] The burden which is to be removed is that of the earth, and both the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, in its *Aṃśāvataraṇa* section (1.54–61), and *Hv* 40– 5 give accounts of this.[27] The *Ādiparvan*'s account is brief, because it is part of the introduction explaining the main narrative which is about to unfold. *Hv* 40–5 tells the story at greater length, because here it is a substantial part of the main narrative itself.[28]

The account in *Hv* 40–5 begins with the Ṛṣi*s* waking Viṣṇu from his yogic sleep and telling him that a cause has arisen for him to consider (40.41). As the spokesman for all the gods, Brahmā gives an account of the state of the human world. All goes well, but for one grievous problem. Earth is overpopulated, oppressed by the strength and power of the *kṣatriyas* so that she is 'deprived of breathing-space' (*nirvivarīkṚtā*, 41.22).[29] Only by their removal can *dharma* be preserved (41.30–1).[30] Brahmā asks Nārāyaṇa to accompany him to the peak of Mt Meru in order to hear Earth's complaint. She reminds her audience of what Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa has done for her in the past. He created her from the marrow (*medas*) of Madhu and Kaiṣabha (42.14–33).[31] In the form of Varāha he raised her from the ocean (42.34). He rescued her from Bali (42.35). Now she has come to him, 'distressed and masterless' (*khidyamānā … anāthā*, 42.36), having been bereft of her *kṣatriyas* by Rāma Bhārgava (42.39–45), bestowed by Kaśyapa upon Manu and his descendants (42.46), and passed from one king to another since then (42.47–53).

The gods decide that they must help Earth, and ask Brahmā to tell them exactly what they should do (43.1–10). Brahmā orders them all to descend (*avarohata*, 43.13), telling them that he has already initiated the process whereby the celestials are to appear as human beings, by causing Ocean to become Śaṃtanu, with Gangā as his first wife, and the eighth Vasu as their son Bhīṣma (43.14–48). Now Brahmā wants the gods to become participants in the war that is to break out among Śaṃtanu's descendants, bringing to an end the *dvāparayuga* and ushering in the *kaliyuga* (43.53–65).

Obeying Brahmā's instructions, the gods 'all sent aspects [of themselves] down to the earth' (*tato 'ṃśān*[32] *avaniṃ devāḥ sarva*

evāvatārayan, 43.69), to be born as Vṛṣṇis, Kurus and Pāñcālas (43.72). But Nārada perceives that Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa has not yet descended. He approaches him with angry words about delaying his descent (44.12):[33] without him the other gods' *aṃsāvataraṇa* is useless (44.13). He tells him something which has as yet remained undisclosed: that Earth's present trouble is caused by the Daityas whom Viṣṇu himself killed in the Tārakāmaya battle. They have come down to earth and settled around Mathurā under the leadership of Kālanemi who has now been born as Kaṃsa, son of Ugrasena (44.61–2).

Replying to Nārada, Viṣṇu tells him that he is already acquainted with all that he has heard.[34] His reason for delaying his descent is that he does not know exactly where or to whom he is to be born, and he asks Brahmā to tell him (45.15–16).[35] Brahmā explains that Kaśyapa, Aditi and Surabhi have been cursed by Varuṇa to live on earth as cowherds, because they stole his cow. They are to live near Mt Govardhana, as Vasudeva, Devakī and Rohiṇī,[36] paying taxes to Kaṃsa as tenants of his land (45.20–36). It is here that Viṣṇu is to be born, from both Devakī and Rohiṇī (45.38).[37] Thus the gods' descent is linked not only with the war among Śaṃtanu's descendants, but also with the overthrow of the tyrant Kaṃsa.

In *Mbh* 1.54–61, the Pāṇḍava-Kaurava War is the sole occasion for the gods' descent. Vaiśaṃpāyana tells Janamejaya the story of how they descend in order to remove the burden of *asuras* who are proliferating upon Earth's surface in the form of human rulers. The word *bhārāvataraṇa* does not occur, but the idea is present. Brahmā tells the *devas*: 'In order to remove Earth's burden from her, manifest aspects of yourselves by being born on her one by one to offer opposition' (*asyā bhūmer nirasituṃ bhāraṃ bhāgaiḥ pṚthak pṚthak / asyām eva prasūyadhvaṃ virodhāyeti* …, 1.58.46). But before they obey Brahmā's command, the gods go to 'Nārāyaṇa Vaikuṇṣha'. Indra, their spokesman, says to Nārāyaṇa, 'Manifest an aspect of yourself by descending!' (*aṃśenāvatarasveti*, 1.58.51), and when Nārāyaṇa assents, makes a covenant with him that they will both descend from heaven to earth. After them, upon Indra's orders, 'the celestials are then born according to their wish in the lineages of brahmin seers and the families of royal seers' (*tato brahmarṣivaṃśeṣu pārthivarsṣikuleṣu ca / jajñire … yathākāmaṃ divaukasaḥ*, 1.59.4).

Later in the narrative, identifications are made between these celestials and the human protagonists in the *Mahābhārata*. Droṇa is born 'from an aspect of BṚhaspati the greatly famed divine seer' (*bṚhaspater bṚhatkīrter devarṣer … / aṃśād*, 1.61.63). Aśvatthāman is born 'from Mahādeva and Death, from desire and from anger, which

merged into one' (*mahādevāntakābhyāṃ ca kāmāt krodhāc ca … / ekatvam upapannānām*, 1.61. 66). Bhīṣma is the youngest of the Vasus (v.69) and Kśpa one of the Rudras (v.71). Śakuni is Dvāpara (v.72), and Sātyaki, Drupada, KṚtavarman and Virāṣa are Maruts (v.73). Duryodhana is born 'from an aspect of Kali' (*kaler aṃśāt*, v.80) and his brothers are *rākṣasas* (v.82). The five Pāṇḍavas are each 'an aspect' of the gods who have fathered them (vv84–5). Abhimanyu is Soma's son, Suvarcas (v.86), DhṚṣṣadyumna is Agni's *aṃśa* and Śikhandin is a *rāksasa* (v.87). The Draupadeyas are Viśvedevas (v.88). Karṇa is 'the unsurpassed aspect of the divine Sun' (*divākarasya … devasyāṃśam anuttamam*, 61.89).

Then come Vāsudeva (i.e. Kṛṣṇa), 'the eternal God of gods called Nārāyaṇa', (*nārāyaṇo nāma devadevaḥ sanātanaḥ*, v.90) and other members of his family. His brother Baladeva is Śeṣa's *aṃśa*,[38] and his son Pradyumna is Sanatkumāra (v.91); 'thus many other aspects of celestials … were born in Vasudeva's family, increasing that family' (*evam anye … bahavo 'ṃśā divaukasām / jajñire vasudevasya kule kulavivardhanāḥ*, v.92).[39] Sixteen thousand *apsaras*-es become Kṛṣṇa's wives (vv93–4), but the goddess usually regarded as Nārāyaṇa's consort, Śrī, becomes Draupadī, the wife of the Pāṇḍavas (v.95).[40] Three final identifications round off the list: Kuntī is the Goddess Siddhi, Mādrī is DhṚti and Gāndhārī is Mati (61.98).

In these accounts of the descent of the gods to remove Earth's burden the initiative for intervening in the human world does not lie with Kṛṣṇa, as in *BhG* 4.5–8, but with Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa. Kṛṣṇa is simply his *aṃśa*, the aspect of himself which the Supreme Actor projects upon the human screen. As the *Harivaṃśa* tells the story, he is not even the unique role which this Actor plays: there have also been appearances as Varāha (42.34) and Vāmana (42.35), to say nothing of the *prādurbhāvas* of *Hv* 31 and references to Narasiṃha and Vāmana in 38.19–20. A closer look at the *Harivaṃśa*'s presentation of the relationship between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa will now follow.

VARYING PERSPECTIVES IN THE *HARIVAṂŚA*

So far portions of the *Harivaṃśa* have been considered as elements in the total picture offered by the *Mahābhārata*, comparable with the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* or the *Aṃśāvataraṇa* section of the *Ādiparvan*. However, to look at the *Harivaṃśa* only in this light would be to misunderstand it. The text as a whole is making its own statement about Kṛṣṇa and his relation to Viṣṇu, and needs to be

considered as a whole, independently of the *Mahābhārata*.

Yet what are the exact dimensions of that whole? P. L. Vaidya postulated an original text which 'contained only the genealogy of the Yadus and the life of Kṛṣṇa, and must have ended with adhy. 98 of the Critical Text'.[41] There is certainly a case to be made for ending at Chapter 98. Its last words are 'This is the end of the dynasty' (*iti vaṃśaḥ samāpyate*, 98.27),[42] and the stories which are related after this appear to be miscellaneous episodes which were tacked on to the end. It is less easy to see 'the genealogy of the Yadus' as the beginning of the *Harivaṃśa*. The conversation between Janamejaya and Vaiśampāyana in *Hv* 1 is essential as a link with the *Mahābhārata* and an introduction to the new narrative, and the purāṇic material as a whole is a prelude which looks forward continually to the family of Vṛṣṇi into which Kṛṣṇa is born. Perhaps then the earliest text to be known as the *Harivaṃśa* may be seen as *Hv* 1–98.

Hv 1–98 is made up of three main sections[43] which take up almost the whole of the *Harivaṃśa*'s two first books, the *Harivaṃśaparvan* and the *Viṣṇuparvan*: (i) *Hv* 1–29: a block of purāṇic material which expresses the *pañcalakṣaṇa* world-view and which is almost identical with *Brahma* 1–17; (ii) *Hv* 30–45: a collection of stories which explain Viṣṇu's appearance as Kṛṣṇa; (iii) *Hv* 46–98: the *Kṛṣṇacarita* — although 46–8, describing Kṛṣṇa's birth, flows so naturally from 30–45 that the *Kṛṣṇacarita* may once have started with Kṛṣṇa's arrival in Nanda's encampment in 49. Each of these sections presents Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu in more than one perspective, so must be examined in turn. Indeed the third section is so important that it will require a chapter of its own. It appears to be a new composition, either produced by the compilers themselves, or so highly valued by them as to become the centrepiece of their compilation. In the other two sections traditional material is used, although it is often given a new emphasis, particularly in *Hv* 30–45.

Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu within the traditional purāṇic world-view (*Hv* 1–29)

Hv 1–29 clearly belongs to a stock of traditional purāṇic material. It has a close parallel in *Brahma* 1–17,[44] and Kirfel offers many parallels of parts of it from various other *purāṇas*.[45] It opens like the *Mahābhārata*, with a conversation between Śaunaka, the spokesman for the seers who have met together for a sacrificial session in the Naimiṣa forest, and the Bard (*sūta*), Ugraśravas, the son of Lomaharṣaṇa. Śaunaka asks Sūta to make good the one gap in his comprehensive story:

1 O Sūta's son, you have related a vast narrative about the Bhāratas and all the princes also, 2 about gods, Dānavas, *gandharvas*, snakes and *rākṣasas*, Daityas, *siddhas* and *guhyakas* also, 3 — marvellous deeds, acts of valour, decisions concerning *dharma*, entertaining discourses, and the foremost and unsurpassed birth. 4 You have told me the holy story in smooth words, pleasant to the mind and to the ear; it delights me as if it were nectar. 5 In it you spoke of the origin of the Kurus, Lomaharṣaṇi, but not of that of the Vṛṣṇis and the Andhakas. Do tell me this [now] (1 *saute sumahad ākhyānaṃ bhavatā parikīrtitam / bhāratānāṃ ca sarvesāṃ pārthivānāṃ tathaiva ca // 2 devānāṃ dānavānāṃ ca gandharvoragarakṣasām / daityānām atha siddhānāṃ guhyakānāṃ tathaiva ca // 3 atyadbhutāni karmāṇi vikramā dharmaniścayāḥ / vicitrāś ca kathāyogā janma cāgryam anuttamam // 4 kathitaṃ bhavatā puṇyaṃ purāṇaṃ ślakṣṇayā girā / manaḥkarṇasukhaṃ tan māṃ prīṇāty amṚtasaṃmitam // 5 tatra janma kurūṇāṃ vai tvayoktaṃ lomaharṣaṇe / na tu vṛṣṇyandhakānāṃ vai tad bhavan prabravītu me // ??* 1.1–5)

In answer to this Sūta tells Śaunaka how Vaiśaṃpāyana once had the very same request made to him by Janamejaya (1.6–14), so that everything that follows is presented as Vaiśaṃpāyana's narrative.[46] In the first twenty-seven chapters of this narrative neither Viṣṇu nor Kṛṣṇa is particularly prominent. In Chapter 1 it is Brahmā who is responsible for creation. Indeed, as the narrative proceeds there are episodes which appear to give Viṣṇu a role subordinate to that of Brahmā: in 1.38 'Viṣṇu' appears to be a name of Brahmā, and in 4.3 Brahmā appoints Viṣṇu as King of the Ādityas. Moreover, in 2.11 it is Brahmā, not Viṣṇu, who gives Dhruva his place in the heavens.[47] Kṛṣṇa is simply mentioned in 25.4 as part of the genealogy of Vṛṣṇi; he is 'Śura's descendant of great renown' (*śaurir mahāyaśaḥ*) who was born from Vasudeva and Devakī, and was later the leader of the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas against Kālayavana (25.15).

Yet at the same time there are hints in *Hv* 1–27 that there is more to this traditional picture than meets the eye. Brahmā may be the creator, but he is described in 1.18 as 'dependent upon Nārāyaṇa' (*nārāyaṇaparāyaṇam*) in his creative activity, and 1.23 identifies Nārāyaṇa with Viṣṇu. In 3.111, 'Hari, the heroic Purusa, the victorious Kṛṣṇa, Prajāpati, the shining Parjanya, the manifest one' is said to possess the whole of this universe (*sa hariḥ puruṣo vīraḥ kṛṣṇo jiṣṇuḥ prajāpatiḥ / parjanyas tapano vyaktas tasya sarvam idaṣ jagat //*).[48] And although Kṛṣṇa's birth may appear insignificant in 25.4, it is announced several times as the point towards which the narrative is moving (1.22; 7.56; 19.35; 22.44; 23.168).[49]

Even so, when the *Harivaṃśa*'s perspective first changes, in the story of the Syamantaka jewel (28.11–29.40), it is simply to focus in greater detail upon a very human Kṛṣṇa. He is one among several Vṛṣṇi-Andhaka chieftains in Dvārakā, respected it is true, but not above the suspicions of the others, who believe that he has committed murder in order to seize the jewel, with all its magical benefits, for himself (28.17).[50] Only the occasional use of the names Janārdana (29.31,35) and Madhusūdana (29.9) point to his identification as

Viṣṇu, but this is not stressed in any way. It may appear that by including this incident here, long before the main account of Kṛṣṇa's life begins, the compilers of the *Harivaṃśa* are showing themselves to be slipshod composers. But in fact this seems more likely to be a deliberate arrangement of their material. The Kṛṣṇa who is presented here simply as part of the dynasty of Yadu is no more than a preliminary sketch, in purely human terms, of the Kṛṣṇa whom the *Harivaṃśa* intends to reveal. Before this can happen, Chapters 30–45 must give an entirely different kind of introduction to Kṛṣṇa's story.

Viṣṇu prepares for his descent as Kṛṣṇa (*Hv* 30–45)

Hv 30–45 is a good example of the creative compilation which was mentioned in Chapter 1. 30–8 is made up of several narratives which have parallels elsewhere and were probably once independent 'mini-purāṇas', to use Rocher's term:[51]

Hv 30	= *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.72.6–61
	Vāyu 97.6–62
	Brahma 213.8–9; 179.10–66a
Hv 31	= *Brahma* 213.10–170
Hv 32–8	= *Matsya* 172–8
(*Hv* 32.1–4,7	= *Brahma* 179.70b–75a)

Brahmāṇḍa 2.3.72.6–61 and *Vāyu* 97.6–62 belong to a section of the core narrative which these two *purāṇas* have in common. They are given the title *Viṣṇumāhātmya* in *Vāyu* 97. In their context, the verses which they share with the *Harivaṃśa* lead into a lively story about how Viṣṇu was cursed to live on earth seven times as a human being because he killed a woman, BhṚgu's wife, in order to save his comrade Indra.[52] The fact that the *Harivaṃśa*'s use of the *Viṣṇumāhātmya* ends just before this story begins suggests some sensitive editing on its compilers' part: the idea that Viṣṇu's appearances on earth were compelled by a curse resulting from his adharmic behaviour was no part of the story which they wanted to tell.

As it now stands, the passage from the *Viṣṇumāhātmya* and that from *Brahma* 213 are combined to form the question and answer in Chapters 30–1 which have already been examined. Then, after further praise of Viṣṇu's manifestations (32.1–9), the *Harivaṃśa* turns to another purāṇic narrative which is found in *Matsya* 172–8 and which tells the story of the Tārakāmaya war (32.10–38.80)[53]. Here Viṣṇu himself acts as the champion of all the gods and kills the *asura* Kālanemi in single combat. The material in Chapters 39–45 has no full-scale parallels in other texts (although the occasional verse has

one elsewhere, e.g. *Hv* 42.37 = *Viṣṇu* 5.1.14).[54] These chapters tell a story which is found elsewhere, but, as has already been seen, they tell it in their own way, with many details which are peculiar to the *Harivaṃśa*. They pick up some of the themes which have been announced in 30–1 (e.g. Viṣṇu as sacrifice, 39.19–29 and 30.21–4; Viṣṇu's yoga, 40.3–35 and 30.18) — another indication that these 'mini-purāṇas' have been brought together to create a particular effect and not as a mindless miscellany.

Hv 30–1 brings about a much greater change of perspective than did 28–9. Janamejaya's question springs naturally from the Syamantaka episode, because it is about the birth of Kṛṣṇa (30.1– 8). But it is no longer a request for information about the human Kṛṣṇa. He is asking to be told 'the marvellous origin of Viṣṇu' (*viṣṇor utpattim āścaryam*, 30.56), and Vaiśaṃpāyana's answer is about 'the celestial activities of Viṣṇu' (*viṣṇoḥ … divyāḥ pravṚttayaḥ*, 31.2). As has already been seen, he speaks of Kṛṣṇa in 31.143–7 as though he were simply one of a series of Viṣṇu's *prādurbhāvas*, not noticeable in any special way.

Yet this immediate perspective is not offered as the key to understanding the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu. Frequent use of *prādurbhāva* seems to belong to the source which the compilers are using here rather than to their own viewpoint. The word occurs only once more in the *Harivaṃśa*, in a passage relating to Kṛṣṇa which will be discussed in Chapter 8. At the same time, the idea behind the use of *prādurbhāva*, of Viṣṇu taking the initiative in manifesting himself in the world in various roles, appears to be congenial to the *Harivaṃśa*. There are two points later on where Viṣṇu's manifestations are recalled, although the word *prādurbhāva* is not used. At 38.17ā20 Kālanemi has a moment of horror when the power of his adversary dawns upon him. He remembers Viṣṇu's past victories over *asuras*: how as Padmanābha he killed Madhu and Kaiṣabha (v. 18); how he killed Kālanemi's ancestor as Narasiṃha; how he took his three steps as Vāmana (v.20).[55] The other series of memories is in 42.14–35, where Earth, appealing for release from her burden, recalls the times when Viṣṇu delivered her in the past — as Padmanābha, from Madhu and Kaiṣabha (vv14–33), as Varāha (v.34), and from Bali (v.35).[56]

However, from *Hv* 32 onwards it is Viṣṇu himself, not any of his manifested forms, to whom attention is directed. The compilers use the story of the Tārakāmaya war to show Viṣṇu in a heroic light. The age-old foes are ranged against one another. Powerful magicians on both sides employ their arts to secure victory. In the end, however, the battle can be decided only by single combat between Viṣṇu and the mighty Kālanemi. After a fierce struggle Viṣṇu decapitates his enemy

with his discus, and goes with Brahmā to the latter's home, the *brahmaloka* (38.79).

At this point (39.1–6) Janamejaya asks for more information about Viṣṇu's stay in the *brahmaloka*, leading into a narrative which is quite different in tone from the battle scenes of 32–8. The story still moves in the celestial sphere, but now the hearer/reader is told the great secret of how Viṣṇu became Kṛṣṇa. First of all the wonder of this event is heightened by building up a picture of Viṣṇu being honoured by the gods in their sacrifice (39.20–9), laying aside his weapons (40.3) and immersing himself in a yogic sleep which sets him apart from all the other gods (40.7–36). He is awakened by the Ṛṣi*s* to hear Brahmā's account of the state of the world (40.37–41.32), then accompanies Brahmā and the other gods to Mt Meru to hear Earth present her case (42). His role throughout, as has been seen, is somewhat passive. It is not only that he appears to depend upon Brahmā for the initiation of the process by which the gods descend to relieve Earth's burden (43.14) and for the essential information as to where and in what family he is to be born (45.15–16). He also has to be goaded by Nārada in order to overcome what seems to be his reluctance to join in the gods' descent.

The purāṇic material which the compilers have gathered together in 30–45 is used to present three aspects of Viṣṇu which will later have parallels in the story of Kṛṣṇa. In 32–8 Viṣṇu is the champion of the gods against Kālanemi and his army. In 39 he is the personification of sacrifice. In 31.153 he is 'the lord of yoga' (*yogeśvara* …), in 44.16 'the best *yogin* of all those engaged in yoga' (*śreṣṭho yogavatāṃ yogī*), while Chapter 40 shows him as the great *yogin* who emits and reabsorbs all creatures, the lord of creation and destruction.[57] These three roles will also be played by Kṛṣṇa in the story which begins in *Hv* 46.

The parallel is most immediately obvious in the case of Viṣṇu as champion of the gods. Kṛṣṇa is also presented as a powerful destroyer of *asuras*, the protector of the cowherd community and of the Vṛṣṇi-Andhakas. His chief enemy Kaṃsa is said to be Kālanemi reborn as a human being.[58] Kālanemi and Kaṃsa both have a spasm of fear before encountering their enemy and both recall other forms in which Viṣṇu has previously defeated *asuras* (38.17–20; 65.36–44). Kaṃsa's death at Kṛṣṇa's hands in 76 is a parallel to Viṣṇu's decapitation of Kālanemi with his *cakra* in 38.

As the gods' champion, Kṛṣṇa, like Viṣṇu, brings light and stability to the universe. *Hv* 32.34–9 describes the transformation of the world which takes place after Viṣṇu has assured the gods that he will defeat the Dānavas. Similarly when Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa have not only

defeated Kaṃsa, but have also rescued their *guru*'s son from a submarine *asura* named Pañcajana, they return to Mathurā bringing with them all the signs of a new *kṣtayuga* (79.35). As Viṣṇu protects the gods, so Kṛṣṇa protects first the herder community, and then his people in Mathurā and Dvārakā. In fighting against Jarāsaṃdha he tells his brother that they are performing the gods' work (81.2), and when he sets off to kill Naraka, it is because Indra himself has asked him to do so (91.31).

The other two parallels are less evident, but they are present nonetheless. Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are each shown receiving sacrifice. For Viṣṇu this is after the defeat of Kālanemi, when he finds himself in another body[59] being worshipped in the sacrifice by the Ṛṣi*s* of the *brahmaloka* (*Hv* 39.20). For Kṛṣṇa this moment comes when he sees himself worshipped in the form of Mt Govardhana by the cowherds, and even joins in this worship in his cowherd form (60.18–22). Both thus share to some extent in Viṣṇu's traditional identification with the sacrifice.

Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are also both depicted as *yogins*. Just as Viṣṇu, immersed in a yogic sleep, emits and reabsorbs all creatures, Kṛṣṇa too can emit creatures from himself, as he does when, at seven years old, he sends out from himself a pack of wolves, each marked with the *śrīvatsa*, in order to persuade Nanda and the other cowherds to move to VṚndāvana (52.29–36). Later on his yogic powers give both Indra (62.13) and Kaṃsa (65.24,27) cause for amazement.

More important than any of these three parallels between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu is the fact that the *Harivaṃśa* evaluates them both as *āścarya* (miracle, wonder). This word occurs in the *Viṣṇumāhātmya* also (*Vāyu* 97.60–2/*Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.72.60–1), so must have been part of the traditional material which the compilers received. In the *Harivaṃśa* it becomes a key word throughout the text, characterising both Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, and identifying them with each other as the miracle which other beings can see and benefit from, but cannot fully understand. The importance of this word is indicated by the fact that some colophons give the *Harivaṃśa* the name *Āścaryaparvan*.[60] It first appears in 30.56–7. Putting his question to Vaiśaṃpāyana, Janamejaya says:

56 Both gods and Daityas say that Viṣṇu is the supreme miracle. Make known to me, ? great sage, the miracle of the origin of Viṣṇu. 57 Tell me this miraculous story, bringing such pleasure, of Viṣṇu, renowned for his strength and valour, boundless in his glory. Let the truth about Viṣṇu's miraculous nature be spoken here through his deeds (56 *āścaryaṃ paramaṃ viṣṇur devair daityaiś ca kathyate / viṣṇor utpattim āścaryaṃ mamācakṣva mahāmune //* 57 *etad āścaryam ākhyānaṃ kathayasva sukhāvaham / prakhyātabalavīryasya viṣṇor amitatejasaḥ / karmaṇāścaryabhūtasya viṣṇos tattvam ihocyatām //* cf. *Vāyu* 97.60–2)

The same word is used of Viṣṇu by Vaiśaṃpāyana in 32.9 when he introduces the story of the Tārakāmaya war, and again at the conclusion of the story in 38.80. The use of *āścarya* in relation to Kṛṣṇa belongs to the theme of concealment and revelation which will be dealt with in the next chapter. It occurs in 50.19, 51.37, 60.35, 70.35–8 and 71.47,[61] and is almost always used when it is a human being who is speaking of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa: Janamejaya (30.56–7), Vaiśaṃpāyana (32.9; 38.80; and in 113), the cowherds (50.19; 51.37), Kṛṣṇa himself when maintaining his cowherd disguise (60.35), Akrūra (70.35–8), Kaṃsa's armourer (71.47).

Although there is little in *Hv* 30–45 which is not found in other *purāṇas* or in the *Mahābhārata*, these chapters carry the story powerfully forward. They lift the figure of Kṛṣṇa out of the mundane context of the Syamantaka narrative into the sphere of the gods. Various possible interpretations of his relation to Viṣṇu are presented to the hearer/reader: perhaps one of a series of *prādurbhāvas* in 31, perhaps the *aṃśa* of Viṣṇu among *aṃśas* of other gods in 40–5, perhaps something altogether more mysterious, the *āścarya* which reflects on earth the wonder that is Viṣṇu. Before any decision can be made as to which word is most fitting, the portrait of Kṛṣṇa which the *Harivaṃśa* gives in its *Kṛṣṇacarita* must be considered in detail.

Chapter Three

Kṛṣṇa in the *Harivaṃśa*

Even in the Vulgate edition of the *Harivaṃśa*, with its extended *Bhaviṣyaparvan*, it is obvious that the story of Kṛṣṇa is more important than any other which it contains. In the Critical Edition this becomes even more obvious: out of its 118 chapters, sixty-eight tell Kṛṣṇa's story. The fact that this is the earliest known *Kṛṣṇacarita* makes it appear inevitable that the story should be told in this way. The *Harivaṃśa*, present-day readers often feel, is just 'telling it how it was'. This impression is heightened by the simple style in which many of the episodes are related: the infant Kṛṣṇa's upsetting of the cart, for instance (50.4–19), or the central events of the Kāliyadamana episode (56.14–25).[1]

Yet the simple narration of such passages can be deceptive. Whatever the *Harivaṃśa*'s composer was doing, it was something more complex than telling a plain unvarnished tale. Both the episodes mentioned in the previous paragraph, for instance, are preceded by long descriptive passages: 49.15–30 paints a picture of the countryside and the herder settlement which is to be the setting for Kṛṣṇa's earliest years, while 55.27–39 is a description of the Yamunā, depicted as a woman in a series of similes. Such passages as these support Ingalls' view that the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Viṣṇuparvan* is a *mahākāvya* which makes use of various literary devices and has 'literary merits, which are considerable'.[2]

This chapter will explore the *Harivaṃśa*'s presentation of Kṛṣṇa's story, not assuming that it is a straightforward telling, but in an awareness of the subtle way in which the narrative is arranged in order to show Kṛṣṇa as divine and yet playing a fully convincing human part which conceals his divinity for much of the time. This should make clear an important point about the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata*: neither of them is basing its *Kṛṣṇacarita* upon a naive

account provided by the *Harivaṃśa*, but both are rearranging and reinterpreting material which has already been carefully worked over.

Throughout the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Kṛṣṇacarita* runs the theme of concealment and revelation. To some extent there is a progressive revelation of Kṛṣṇa's identity, but it is not a straightforward progression. Disguise and recognition alternate with one another as the story proceeds. There is another sense also in which the progression is not straightforward. The hearers/readers of the *Harivaṃśa* know already when Kṛṣṇa's story begins that he is Viṣṇu descended to earth. Therefore when they encounter a phrase like 'and cloud-dark Kṛṣṇa was Hari changed into another shape' (*meghakṛṣṇas tu kṛṣṇo 'bhūd dehāntaragato hariḥ*, 50.3), although this is a reference to Kṛṣṇa's concealment, it is also a reminder of his true identity, and in that sense part of revelation. Concealment and revelation will therefore refer to the experience of the other characters in the story and what it is that conceals Kṛṣṇa's identity from them or reveals it to them. It will be assumed that the hearers/readers know throughout who Kṛṣṇa is, so that some of the mistaken perceptions of these other characters will strike them with the force of irony.

The *Kṛṣṇacarita* may be divided into two parts: the first is Chapters 46–78, which takes Kṛṣṇa's story from his birth to his installation of Ugrasena as king in place of his son, the tyrant Kaṃsa whom Kṛṣṇa has just killed. It ends with his ringing rejection of any claims to sovereignty and self-proclamation as 'a forest-dweller [living] among the cows with the herders' (… *gomadhye gopaiḥ saha vanecaraḥ*, 78.35). In this first part the emphasis is upon concealment rather than revelation. Sometimes Kṛṣṇa appears to be deliberately concealing his identity, as in the episode where he usurps Indra's place in the sacrifice on Mt Govardhana (60.35). More often, the concealment comes about through the cowherds' inability to accept the revelation which is offered them (e.g. 51.19,29; 65.45). The second part of Kṛṣṇa's story (Chapters 79–98) opens with Kṛṣṇa preparing to play the kind of royal role which he has just rejected,[3] and learning military arts from Sāndīpani. In this part of the story Kṛṣṇa is more and more openly revealed as Viṣṇu's human embodiment.

'VIṢṆU DISGUISED AS A COWHERD' (*HV* 46–78)

The birth of Kṛṣṇa

From the human point of view Kṛṣṇa's story begins in almost total

concealment. Nārada warns Kaṃsa that his kinswoman Devakī's eighth child will be his death (46.15), since this child will be the highest of the gods (vv16–17), who has already killed Kaṃsa in a former life when the latter was Kālanemi, and so needs to be dealt with as soon as possible (v.18). Kaṃsa makes plans to do so, at the same time asking boastfully, 'Who is there in the human world who could shake me?' (*ko 'sti yo mānuṣe loke māṃ kṣobhayitum utsahet*, v.23).

Thus in 46–7 the human actors in the drama are to some extent in the dark as to what is going on. Kaṃsa imagines that he is master of the situation, keeping Devakī under surveillance and destroying her children at birth. Devakī does not understand the situation at all, neither Kaṃsa's malice nor the apparent misfortune which is to be for her good when her seventh pregnancy appears to end in a miscarriage, as Saṃkarṣaṇa is drawn out of her womb (thus accounting for his name, 47.31) and implanted in that of her co-wife Rohiṇī, who is living safely in the cowherds' settlement.[4]

At a deeper than human level, however, Viṣṇu is at work with his helper Nidrā, the goddess who personified his yogic sleep in 39–40 and was described there, as here in 48.10, as his daughter (*viṣṇuśarīrajā*, 40.31).[5] They cause the *asuras* known as the Six Embryos (*ṣaḍgarbhāḥ*) to be born as Devakī's first six sons (47.11–27),[6] effect Saṃkarṣaṇa's transfer from Devakī to Rohiṇī (47.30–2), and arrange their own births as Devakī's eighth son and Yaśodā's daughter (47.32–8). Their plan is that these last two babies will be exchanged for each other. Viṣṇu tells Nidrā: 'You will be the ninth child in our family' (… *tvaṃ navarno 'smākaṃ kale garbho bhaviṣyasi*, 47.34). Her life as Devakī's daughter will be short: Kaṃsa will kill her when he hears of her birth (47.38). But upon her death she will become a goddess, whose appearance will proclaim her kinship with Kṛṣṇa and with his brother:

> With dark skin like mine, and with a face like Saṃkarṣaṇa's, having powerful arms which look like my arms on earth (*macchavīsadṚśī kṛṣṇā Saṃkarṣaṇasamānanā / bibhratī vipulān bāhīn*[7] *mama bāhūpamān bhuvi* // 47.39)[8]

Indra will perform her divine consecration (v.46) and give her a home on the Vindhya mountain. Remembering Kṛṣṇa (*kṚtvā manasi mām*) she will kill two Dānavas, Sumbha and Nisumbha (v.49) and will move about the triple world in whatever form she pleases (*trailokyacāriṇī … kāmarūpiṇī*, v. 50). She will be offered animal sacrifices (v.51) and will be able to bestow gifts and protection upon those who know Kṛṣṇa's worth (*matprabhāvajñāḥ*, v. 52).

In due course Devakī and Yaśodā give birth in the same night

(48.13). Vasudeva exchanges the two babies (vv18–20) and announces to Kaṃsa that Devakī has given birth to a daughter (v.21). Kaṃsa dashes the child upon a stone (v.28), and as she dies sees her transformed into a mighty four-armed goddess (vv29–30) who foretells his death (vv34–5). For Viṣṇu and Nidrā all is going according to plan, but for the human beings in the situation all is darkness and confusion, even though the gods and the natural world rejoice at Kṛṣṇa's birth (48.14–17). The scene is now set for Nanda to bring Kṛṣṇa to his encampment:

> Where the Lady Rohiṇī lived, the delight of Vasudeva, there he brought Kṛṣṇa, concealed like the sun about to rise (*sā yatra rohiṇī devī vasudevasukhāvahā / tatra taṃ bālasūryābhaṃ kṛṣṇaṃ gūḍhaṃ nyaveśayat* // 49.30)

The child is 'Hari changed into another shape' (*dehāntaragato hari*ḥ, 50.3), and he lives there 'without being' (*asata*ḥ, 50.1, or, as Nīlakaṇṭha explains it, 'without manifesting himself' (*aprakāśamānasya*).

The three portents

The first indication which the herder community receives that there is something extraordinary about the child comes in 50.4–19. Left in apparent safety underneath a cart, Kṛṣṇa kicks it over with one foot (50.6), so that his foster-mother finds him lying face downwards and crying among its wreckage (50.6–8). Neither Yaśodā nor Nanda can understand how the cart came to be overturned, but as they are discussing the incident some boys tell them:

> This child made the cart fall over with his foot. We saw it by chance as we were running along (*anena śiśunā yānam etat pādena pātitam / asmābhiḥ saṃpatadbhis tu dṚṣṣam etad yadṚcchayā* // 50.18bc)

The effect of this is to amaze the people of Nanda's settlement. 'Crying "It's a miracle!", they are all wide-eyed with astonishment'. (*āścaryam iti te sarve vismayotphullalocanā*ḥ, v. 19a). The herders' use of *āścarya* here suggests no insight into Kṛṣṇa's true identity, but merely the amazement of people who encounter the inexplicable.[9] For the hearer/reader who remembers that *āścarya* has been used of Viṣṇu, however, it is an indication of Kṛṣṇa's divine nature.

Then comes the death of Pūtanā. All that Nanda, Yaśodā and the other cowherds are aware of is hearing a noise in the night and 'seeing the bird lying lifeless on the ground, without breasts and as though torn in pieces by a thunderbolt' (*te tām apaśyan patitāṃ visaṃjñāṃ vipayodharām / śakuni*ṃ *nihatāṃ bhūmau vajreṇeva vidāritām*, 50.24). Nandagopa and Yaśodā both admit their ignorance of how this can

have come about (50.27–8). They do not know that the baby himself has killed the *rākṣasī* who had intended to poison him with her breast milk. In the same way, a group of women later come across the child on the ground between two fallen trees (51.20), without knowing that he himself has uprooted them by dragging a heavy mortar between them.[10] Apart from the witness of the boys in 50.18, the miraculous circumstances of each event are hidden from the cowherds, and all that they see is their result. Thus, even though it is said of the uprooting of the trees that Kṛṣṇa 'assumed his divine strength in order to demonstrate it to the cowherds' (*nidarśanārthaṃ gopānāṃ divyaṃ svabalam āsthitaḥ*, 51.19), the community learns nothing about Kṛṣṇa's identity. The marvel (*āścaryabhūtam*, 51.37) which amazes them is simply the inexplicable nature of the events:

> What made these two trees fall without wind, without rain, without being struck by lightning, without being damaged by an elephant? (*vinā vātaṃ vinā varṣaṃ vidyutprapatanaṃ vinā / vinā hastikṚtaṃ doṣaṃ kenemau pātitau drumau //* 51.29)

The cowherds' reaction to all these events is one of fear and bewilderment (50.14,16,27,28). They realise after the Pūtanā incident that they are at risk from Kaṃsa (50.29), presumably because they have recognised the dead body as that of Kaṃsa's nurse (50.20). They also link together the three incidents, saying of the uprooting of the *arjuna* trees 'This is the third portent to happen here in the settlement' (*autpātikam idaṃ ghoṣe tṛtīyaṃ vartate tv iha*, 51.32), and wonder whether it would be better not to live there any longer (51.33).

Their minds are made up for them when Kṛṣṇa decides, at the age of seven, that he would like to move to VṚndāvana. In order to force the herders to agree with him he emits troops of wolves from the hairs of his body to terrorise the community (52.29–30). Although the wolves are said in 52.33 to be 'marked with the *śrīvatsa*' (*śrīvatsakṚtalakṣaṇāḥ*) and to have his own dark face (*kṛṣṇasya kṛṣṇavadanā*), nobody connects them with Kṛṣṇa.[11] Once again there is complete ignorance among the herders of who he is and what his powers are.

Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana

Despite his youth, from the arrival in VṚndāvana onwards Kṛṣṇa is described as the protector of the cows and human beings who together make up the community:

> There no calves perish, nor cows, nor other people, where Madhusūdana is living for the welfare of the worlds (*na tatra vatsāḥ sīdanti na gāvo netare janāḥ / yatra tiṣṣhati lokānāṣ bhavāya madhusūdanaḥ //* 53.34)[12]

This *śloka* reminds the hearer/reader that Kṛṣṇa cares for the welfare

of the world as well as of the immediate community. The phrase '*lokānāṃ bhavāya*' not only states this, but also echoes Nārada's injunction to Viṣṇu in 45.37: 'Descend there for the welfare of the worlds, Madhusūdana' (*tatrāvatara lokānāṃ bhavāya madhusūdana*).

Yet the only person who recognises Kṛṣṇa is Saṃkarṣaṇa.[13] In 54.22–3 he makes the following comparison between the season of autumn and his brother:

> 22 See, Kṛṣṇa, the black clouds, which have gathered together in the sky, adorned with cranes flying up, stealing their colour from your body. 23 This is your time for sleep; the heavens are like your body. Just like you in your unknown dwelling, so the moon dwells in the rainy season (22 *paśya kṛṣṇa ghanān kṛṣṇān balākotpātabhūṣaṇān / gagane tava gātrāṇāṃ varṇacorān samutthitān //* 23 *tava nidrākaraḥ kālas tava gātropamaṃ nabhaḥ / tvam ivājñātavasatiṃ candro vasati vārṣikīm //*)

Here the comparison between Kṛṣṇa and the moon, both dwelling hidden, performs the double function of reminding the hearer/reader of Kṛṣṇa's identity and making clear that this is still a secret from the herder community. The reference to 'your time for sleep' points back to the description of the sleeping Viṣṇu in 40.7–35. Another reference to Kṛṣṇa's identity appears in 54.30 where Saṃkarṣaṇa addresses his brother as Hari and Trivikrama.

With the episode of the taming of Kāliya, Kṛṣṇa's own awareness of his identity is touched upon for the first time. When the boy sees the serpent's dangerous pool in the Yamunā he announces his intention of cleansing it and driving out its present occupant, adding:

> For this reason I am living in this settlement and have been born as a cowherd:[14] for the punishment of those evildoers who are set upon the wrong road (*etadarthaṃ ca vāso 'yaṃ vraje 'smin gopajanma ca / amīṣām utpathasthānāṃ śāsanārthaṃ durātmanām //* 55.56)

In contrast with the three earlier episodes when Kṛṣṇa's danger was realised only after his miraculous preservation, here it is seen by the whole community (56.17–25). Again it is Saṃkarṣaṇa who recognises his brother's true identity and reminds Kṛṣṇa of it. The end of the episode finds the herders themselves struggling towards understanding:

> Even though it's obvious, we cowherds in the forest do not recognise that Kṛṣṇa is such a great being, like a hidden fire in the settlement (*vyaktam eva vayaṃ gopā vane yat kṛṣṇam īdṚśam / mahadbhūtaṃ na jānīmaś channam agnim iva vraje //* 56.45)[15]

But with the admission of their own ignorance comes a measure of insight. They circumambulate Kṛṣṇa reverently (56.41), acknowledge him as their refuge in misfortune (v.43) and praise him (v.46).

It might be expected that this would lead into an account of some greater revelation, but what follows appears to glorify Saṃkarṣaṇa rather than Kṛṣṇa. Saṃkarṣaṇa — or Rāma as he begins to be called

at this point (57.1) — kills an *asura* in the form of a donkey, Dhenuka (57.3–26), and then another *asura* named Pralamba who, assuming human form (58.14), joins the group of cowherd boys in their games. This time it is Kṛṣṇa who speaks to his brother to remind him of his true nature (58.35–49).

With Chapter 59 the narrative returns more immediately to Kṛṣṇa. It opens with him very much in concealment, asking out of curiosity (*kautūhalād*) 'What is this Śakra-feast, which you're so excited about?' (*ko 'yaṃ śakramaho nāma yena vo haṚṣa āgataḥ*, 59.3b). When an old cowherd tells him that they keep Śakra's feast because he gives them rain and brings them prosperity (59.4–18) Kṛṣṇa launches into a powerful dissuasive against this Śakra-worship, saying that the cowherds should replace it by worshipping Mt Govardhana on whose slopes their cattle graze. In accepting this suggestion the cowherds praise Kṛṣṇa in words which go beyond their recognition of him in 56.43–5. They extol his wisdom (60.2), his protection of them (60.4), his mighty deeds and fame (60.5–6), his beauty, grace and youthful heroism (60.7–8). The most telling of all these praises is in v.3:

> You are our goal; you are our delight; you are the one who knows us; you are our support; you give us fearlessness in the midst of our fears; you are friendly to us, your friends (*tvaṃ gatis tvaṃ ratiś caiva tvaṃ vettā tvaṃ parāyaṇam / bhayeṣv abhayadas tvaṃ nas tvaṃ caiva suhṚdāṣ suhṚt //*)

In all this there is no clear recognition of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, even though *gatis, vettā* and *parāyaṇam* all suggest it to the hearer/reader. He is 'the greatest among humans, as Puraṃdara is among the gods' (*uttamas tvaṃ ca martyeṣu deveṣv iva puraṃdaraḥ*, 60.6b).

The cowherds' worship of the mountain ends with a miraculous event:

> At the end of the sacrifice Kṛṣṇa became the mountain by his magic power, and obtained the last of the rice, milk, curds and meat (*yajanānte tad annaṃ tu tat payo dadhi cottamam / māṃsaṃ ca māyayā kṛṣṇo girir bhūtvā samaśnute //* 60.18)

It is doubtful whether the herdsmen are aware of this transformation, however, since Kṛṣṇa also retains his cowherd form:

> And the mighty Lord, concealed in that form, bent down with the cowherds and himself worshipped himself (*bhagavān api tenaiva rūpeṇācchāditaḥ prabhuḥ / saha taiḥ praṇato gopair vavandātmānam ātmanā //* 60.22)

He not only worships himself; he even shares in the general amazement:

> Kṛṣṇa entered the settlement, accompanied by the cowherds, amazed by the miracle which had taken place during the mountain sacrifice (*kṛṣṇo 'pi gopasahito viveśa vrajam eva ha / giriyajñapravṚttena tenāścaryeṇa vismitaṅ //* 60.35)

Here Kṛṣṇa is not merely concealed, but seems to be himself deliberately keeping up a pretence of being an ordinary cowherd rather than, as in other episodes, allowing his marvellous nature to be perceived.

However, more miracles follow. Angered at being deprived of his offerings, Indra sends torrential rain upon the herders and their animals, who appeal to Kṛṣṇa to save them (61.24). He does so by plucking up Mt Govardhana and holding it over people and cows like an enormous umbrella.[16] He speaks to the cowherds with the authority of a creator and protector and invites them to come under the shelter which he has provided for them, a shelter which would be sufficient for the whole of the triple world (61.52–5). They do so, and are safe.

This leads to the first occasion on which Kṛṣṇa is recognised and praised by a divine figure. Seeing him perform 'this more than godlike action' (*atidivaṃ … tat karma*, 61.60; cf.62.11) Indra realises his mistake in trying to oppose Kṛṣṇa. He 'recognised Viṣṇu disguised as a cowherd' (*gopaveṣadharaṃ viṣṇuṃ parijajñe*, 62.4). Expressing his satisfaction with what Kṛṣṇa has done (62.11–12) he says that he has come to consecrate him as king of the cows of the celestial Goloka, claiming to speak in Brahmā's name and in the name of the celestial cows as well as in his own (62.37). As he, Indra, is king of the gods, so Kṛṣṇa is king of the cows and therefore is given the names Govinda and Upendra:

> 43 I am indeed king of the gods while you have become king of the cows. The worlds will praise you eternally as Govinda upon the earth. 44 Although as the lord who has been set up over the cows you are king over me, the gods in heaven will sing you as Upendra, ? Kṛṣṇa. (43 *ahaṃ kilendro devānāṃ tvaṃ gavām indratāṃ gataḥ / govinda iti lokās tvāṃ stoṣyanti bhuvi śāśvatam //* 44 *mamopari yathendras tvaṃ sthāpito gobhir īśvaraḥ / upendra iti kṛṣṇa tvāṃ gāsyanti divi devatāḥ //* 62.43–4)

Although 'Upendra' would normally mean 'lesser Indra', here it is expressly stated that Kṛṣṇa is in fact above Indra. Even though the latter is in the position of bestowing honours upon Kṛṣṇa, he is also acknowledging him as his superior.

Besides offering Kṛṣṇa sovereignty over Goloka, Indra offers him authority in the world of human beings. Two of the four months that have been Indra's will be given to Kṛṣṇa — the two months of autumn when the rains have died away (62.45–6). Indra describes the autumn at some length (62.45–57), speaking of it as the time when Kṛṣṇa, as Viṣṇu, awakens from his sleep (62.55; cf.54.23). Then he consecrates Kṛṣṇa with milk, amid universal rejoicing (62.58–66). At this point the *Harivaṃśa* links up once more with the main theme of the *Mahābhārata*. Indra asks Kṛṣṇa to befriend his son Arjuna, and speaks

of Kṛṣṇa's triumphs over his personal enemies as if they were only preliminaries to the really important business of helping the Pāṇḍavas (62.68–88). Kṛṣṇa tells him that he knows all about Arjuna's birth and his whole family, and intends to help him (62.89– 98), upon which Indra goes on his way (62.99).

During this conversation the human beings in the drama fade out of sight. It is implied that the cowherds have witnessed Kṛṣṇa's consecration, since they now call him 'Govinda' for the first time (63.3). On his return to the settlement they honour him, seeing him as 'equal to a god' (*devatulya*, 63.3) and his deeds as 'more than human' (*amānuṣāṇi*, 63.4). As in earlier episodes, they show a mixture of insight and blindness; they realise that Kṛṣṇa is no mere mortal, but they are at a loss to understand what he is (63.8). For the time being Kṛṣṇa has no desire to dispel their blindness. He tells them to continue to think of him as their kinsman (63.10–13).

The young hero[17] now turns his mind to the pleasures of the season which he has won from Indra (63.15). He arranges fights between bulls[18] and between cowherds (63.16–17), and enjoys himself with the girls of the community whom he has 'rounded up in the night' (*rātrau saṃkālya*, 63.18). When his pleasures are interrupted by the appearance of Ariṣṣa, an *asura* in bull form,[19] it is as though a monstrous distortion of Kṛṣṇa himself has arrived upon the scene. Just as Kṛṣṇa enjoys himself with the cowherd maidens,[20] so Ariṣṣa enjoys himself with the cows. But while the girls come to Kṛṣṇa willingly,[21] Ariṣṣa's conquests are victims, not partners: 'the bull did not take his pleasure in the cow stalls without a struggle' (*goṣṣheṣu na ratiṃ lebhe vinā yuddhaṃ sa govṚṣaḥ*, 64.9a).

In the confrontation between Kṛṣṇa and Ariṣṣa, the latter is described as strong and ferocious, but there is no question of his getting the better of his young opponent. Kṛṣṇa tears off one of Ariṣṣa's horns, using it as a weapon, and soon disposes of him. The herder community's reaction is described, no longer wonder at the inexplicable *āścarya*, but praise and gratitude to their protector:

> 22 When they saw that Govinda had killed the haughty bull-Dānava, all beings praised his deed, saying 'Bravo, bravo'. 23 And when the fair-faced Upendra had killed the bull at nightfall, he whose eyes are like lotuses was resplendent once more. 24 Then all the cowherds did homage to the lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa in their delight, as the immortals [do homage to] Śakra in heaven (22 *govindena hataṃ dṚṣṣvā dṚptaṃ vṚṣabhadānavam / sādhu sādhviti bhūtāni tat karmāsyābhituṣṣuvuḥ // 23 sa copendro vṚṣaṃ hatvā kāntavaktro niśāmukhe / aravindābhanayanaḥ punar eva rarāja ha // 24 te 'pi govṚttayaḥ sarve kṛṣṇaṃ kamalalocanam / upāsāṃ cakrire hṚṣṣāḥ svarge Śakram ivāmarāḥ // 64.22–4*)[22]

At this point the scene changes to Mathurā, where Kaṃsa's fears have been mounting. He summons the Yādava leaders and tells them what he has heard of Kṛṣṇa's exploits in the forest.[23] Even though the

exact identity of his enemy is still not completely clear to him (65.45a), he knows now, for Nārada has told him, that the baby whom he killed years ago lives as a goddess on Mt Vindhya (65.51), and that his true enemy has grown up as Nandagopa's son in VṚndāvana. Kaṃsa plans therefore to exterminate Kṛṣṇa. Either he will succumb to his last agent in the forest, the āsuric horse Keśin,[24] or he will be lured to Mathurā to meet his doom there. With the latter aim in mind, Kaṃsa despatches Akrāra to Nanda's settlement in order to bring Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa back to Mathurā.

On Kaṃsa's orders, Keśin attacks the herdsmen of VṚndāvana (67.4), who call upon Kṛṣṇa for help (67.14). As on previous occasions, they assess Kṛṣṇa's chances of success in purely human terms, even after they have already seen such marvels on his part and have just appealed for his help as 'lord of the world' (*jagannātham*, 67.14). 'With their human minds' (*manuṣyabuddhayo*, 67.18; cf.633* line 3; 56.28) they regard him as being in grave danger (67.19). When he kills Keśin, however, they rejoice, and their rejoicing is echoed by Nārada, invisible to them all, who recognises Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu (67.52) and gives him the name Keśava[25] in honour of this exploit (67.58).[26] The herders are said to hear Nārada's words (67.68), so should now be aware of Kṛṣṇa's identity.

Whether they are or not, Kṛṣṇa simply returns with the others to the encampment, and is found there by Akrūra. In the latter's case there is no doubt whatsoever of his awareness. Like Indra, he sees in Kṛṣṇa 'Viṣṇu disguised as a cowherd' (*gopaveṣadharo viṣṇur*, 68.21, cf.62.4),[27] and notices the *śrīvatsa* upon his breast (68.20).[28] The description of Kṛṣṇa which follows, however, should not be taken literally. It is what Akrūra sees with his 'divine eye' (68.37):[29] Kṛṣṇa wearing a diadem, with a parasol over his head, adorned with earrings and necklace (68.22–3), wearing a yellow garment (v.24), and with hands in which discus and mace would be at home (v.26), 'descended for the welfare of this world, his first step' (*avatīrṇo bhavāyeha prathamaṃ padam ātmanaḥ*, v. 2 7a).

Akrūra then, *kṣatriya* and kinsman of Kṛṣṇa in human terms, sees more clearly than the herders who Kṛṣṇa is. Nevertheless he treats him as a younger relative, calling him '*tāta*' (68.17; 69.2; 70.8; 71.3), exhorting him to do his filial duty (69.17–25), asking him to look after his chariot and horses (70.8). But a greater revelation is to follow. When Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are returning with him to Mathurā, Akrūra leaves the two boys in his chariot while he goes to perform his ablutions in the Yamunā and to worship Ananta.[30] Under the water he sees a vision of Śeṣa and Viṣṇu (70.16–29), and knows them to be identical with the two boys, because looking towards the chariot he

sees them there transfigured (70.30). When Akrūra has finished his ablutions, Kṛṣṇa tells him that he thinks that he must have seen some miracle (*āścarya*, 70.35b). Akrūra replies that Kṛṣṇa himself is the greatest of miracles, and that what he has seen in the water he now sees before him (70.36–8).

Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā

Although Kṛṣṇa's identity with Viṣṇu has now been established for at least one human being, this episode is followed by a renewed period of concealment. In 71.3–4 Akrūra advises the boys against going to their father's house, so they enter Mathurā as two unknown youths. Their progress towards Kaṃsa's palace is marked by three incidents. First they meet a dyer carrying fine clothes, for which they ask. When he refuses them because they belong to Kaṃsa, Kṛṣṇa strikes him down, and he and Saṃkarṣaṇa seize the clothes and wear them (71.7–14). Next they meet a garland-seller, who gives them some of his wares and in return receives a promise of riches from Kṛṣṇa (71.15–20), which overawes him and makes him think that the two boys are *yakṣas* (71.21). Finally they meet a hunch-backed woman who has unguents for the royal bath. The boys ask her for unguents to anoint themselves, telling her that they are wrestlers; when she gives them what they ask, Kṛṣṇa straightens her spine (71.22–35). In each of these cases those who meet Kṛṣṇa are judged by their attitudes towards him. To the dyer it is a judgement of condemnation, to the other two reward and blessing, but none of them realises who Kṛṣṇa is.[31]

When at last the boys arrive at Kaṃsa's palace, Kṛṣṇa gives a sign to the king that he too is to be judged. Having asked to see Kaṃsa's great bow, Kṛṣṇa breaks it with a noise which is heard throughout the women's quarters and fills all the regions of heaven (71.45). The keeper of the king's weapons reports this to Kaṃsa, saying 'Listen to my report of a miracle in the armoury' (*śruyatāṃ mama vijñāpyam āścaryaṃ dhanuṣo gṣhe*, 71.47a).[32] Kaṃsa, full of fear, makes sure that all is ready for tomorrow, and incites his wrestlers, who are *asuras* in disguise, to do their worst against the two boys who will be their opponents in the arena (72.15–21). He asks his elephant-keeper to let his animal, Kuvalayāpīḍa, loose upon the boys before they even get into the arena. In talking with this man he reveals his own identity as the son of a Dānava (73.18–19). So now both Kṛṣṇa and Kaṃsa are revealed in their true natures, and the last act between them is about to be played out in Kaṃsa's arena.

What better place than an arena for a climactic revelation of Kṛṣṇa's

identity? Together with Rāma, he speedily foils Kaṃsa's plans for their being trampled to death at the entrance by Kuvalayāpīḍa (74.21–38), and enters upon the stage (*avatīrṇo*, 74.39). Yet this is not the triumphant appearance, openly recognised, of a divine being. What strikes the spectators most is the disparity between Kṛṣṇa and his opponent Cāṇūra: one is a boy while the other is a huge Andhra (*mahān andhras*, 75.15). Kṛṣṇa, however, announces to them that in spite of this disparity he is ready to engage with his adversary (vv17–18). The spectators are intent upon the fight, and 'cries of "Bravo!"' (*sādhuvādāṃś*, v. 34) are heard as Kṛṣṇa more than holds his own against his opponent. Kaṃsa signals for the music which accompanies the fight to stop,[33] but as the human music dies away the celestial music begins. Gods, although invisible, are present in their chariots, and the Seven Ṛṣis shout encouragement to Kṛṣṇa (vv36–9) in his fight against this 'Dānava in a wrestler's body' (*Dānavaṃ malladehinam*, v.39) Kṛṣṇa strikes Cāṇūra so hard that the latter's eyes burst out of their sockets and he falls down dead (vv42–4).

The death of the other wrestler at the hands of Saṃkarṣaṇa[34] is rather briefly described, and Kṛṣṇa is said to kill another athlete as well, Tosalaka (76.1). Only at this point does the hearer/reader discover that Kṛṣṇa's family and foster family are in the audience: the reactions of Nanda and the other cowherds (76.10), Devakī (v.11) and Vasudeva (v.12) are each described in turn. Kaṃsa's reaction is described last of all: panic-stricken, he orders that Vasudeva and Nanda be seized, as well as the cows and goods of the other herdsmen (76.19–22). Angered by these words, Kṛṣṇa leaps up to Kaṃsa's throne and attacks him. The king has a moment of blurred truth when 'he thought that the all-pervading Govinda had got there out of the air' (*ākāśād iva govindaṃ ???? tatrāgataṣ vibhum*, 76.28). Kṛṣṇa pulls Kaṃsa off his throne by the hair and drags him around the arena until he is dead. This time Rāma's share in the conflict is even more briefly described. He kills Kaṃsa's brother Sunāman (76.45), after which the two heroes go to their father's house in triumph (v.46).

Even after this victory, the pattern of alternating concealment and revelation is maintained, so that Kṛṣṇa's status is immediately played down. In mourning for their dead husband, Kaṃsa's wives wonder how he could have been killed by a mere mortal, he who had 'waged war on Indra' (*indreṇa saha saṣgrāmaṃ kṚtvā*, 77.21) and 'shaken the unshakable Ocean by his showers of arrows' (*tvayā sāgaram akṣobhyaṃ vikṣobhya śaravṚṣṣibhiḥ*). This downgrading of Kṛṣṇa contains, of course, a great deal of irony. Kaṃsa's wives do not know that he has won a more decisive and spectacular victory over Indra than their husband's, and that soon he will be victorious in Ocean's

kingdom also.

For all the irony of the situation, Kṛṣṇa acts out the role of 'mere mortal' vis-à-vis Kaṃsa's widows. He expresses regret for having reduced them to this state (78.4). Even so, he regards Kaṃsa's death as justified, because he was an evil man (78.7–9) and he declares to Ugrasena that he has not killed him out of any desire for self-aggrandisement:

> 33 I have no dealings with sovereignty, neither do I desire sovereignty, and neither is it through coveting sovereignty that I have killed Kaṃsa. 34 But it was for the good of the world and for the sake of his family's reputation, which he had stained, that your son and his younger brother were killed. 35 As for me, I am a forest dweller [living] among the cows with the herders: I shall wander happily wherever I will, like an elephant 36 So I declare to you truly as many as a hundred times: I have nothing to do with kingship — let this be made known (33 *?? hi rājyena me kāryaṃ ?ā?? ahaṃ rājyalālasaḥ / na cāpi rājyalubdhena mayā kaṃso nipātitaḥ //* 34 *kiṃ tu lokahitārthāya kīrtyarthaṃ ca sutas tava / vyaṅgabhūta kulasyāsya sānujo vinipātita //* 35 *ahaṃ sa eva gomadhye gopaiḥ saha vanecaraḥ / prītimān vicariṣyāmi kāmacārī yathā gajah //* 36 *etāvac chataśo 'py evaṃ satyena prabravīmi te / na me kāryaṃ nṚpatvena vijñāpyaṃ kriyatām idam //* 78.33–6)

However, this firm denial of any interest in acquiring sovereignty is in marked contrast to the kingly role which Kṛṣṇa increasingly plays from this point onwards.

VIṢṆU RECOGNISED BY HIS WEAPONS (*HV* 79–98)

The war against Jarāsaṃdha and the foundation of Dvārakā

In spite of his declaration to Ugrasena, Kṛṣṇa does not return to VṚndāvana. Acknowledged as Vasudeva's sons, he and his brother now receive the training in military arts which is appropriate for *kṣatriya* youths.[35] Their teacher Sāndīpani is so impressed by their superhuman powers that he thinks that they must be the gods of the sun and the moon (79.7).[36] In return for his teaching he asks them to restore his only son, drowned in the sea when on a pilgrimage to Prabhāsa. Accompanied by Rāma, Kṛṣṇa goes beneath the waves to ask Ocean for Sāndīpani's son (79.12). Ocean tells him that the Daitya Pañcajana has taken the child, and Kṛṣṇa immediately finds Pañcajana, kills him, seizes the conch shell which becomes famous as Pāñcajanya (v.16), and restores the boy to his father. On their return to Mathurā from their *guru*'s house, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are greeted by all the Yādavas with Ugrasena at their head (79.26). All goes well with Mathurā once the heroes have come back, so that signs of the

kṚtayuga appear (79.35).

Again, this triumphal entry leads only into a further episode of struggle. Kaṃsa's father-in-law Jarāsaṃdha marches against Mathurā with many powerful allies (80). Kṛṣṇa tells Rāma: 'The purpose of the gods makes haste, without any doubt' (*tvarate khalu kāryārtho devatānāṃ na saṃśayaḥ*, 81.2b,[37] and says that the destruction of Jarāsaṃdha's army will relieve the earth of her burden:

> 12 Wearied by her burden in her proper sphere, this Earth has gone to heaven, oppressed by the multitudes of troops of these chiefs of kings, and this densely populated earth is completely covered by powerful kingdoms. 13 In a truly short time the earth will be emptied of these multitudes of kings who will have been slain in their thousands (12 *sthāne bhāraparisṛāntā vasudheyaṃ divaṃ gatā / eṣāṃ nṚpatimukhyānāṃ balaughair abhipīṣitā / bhūmir nirantarā ceyaṃ balarāṣṣrābhisaṃvṚttā* // 13 *svalpena khalu kālena viviktaṃ pṚthivītalam / bhaviṣyati narendraughaiḥ śataśo vinipātitaiḥ* // 81.12–13)[38]

During the battle 'the excellent thought occurred to the two Yādavas that they should receive their ancient weapons' (*tābhyāṃ … yādavābhyāṃ matir babhau / āyudhānāṃ purāṇānām ādāne kṚtalakṣaṇā* // 81.55). Four of Viṣṇu's weapons then fall from heaven (vv56–60). Rāma takes for himself the plough Saṃvartaka[39] and the club Saunanda (vv61–2) and Kṛṣṇa takes the Śāmga bow and the mace Kaumodakī (vv63–4).[40] Although only Kṛṣṇa is called Viṣṇu, the two young men together are described as 'two physical representations of Viṣṇu himself' (*sākṣād viṣṇos tanūpamau*, v.65). As with the death of Kaṃsa, the celestials watch the battle:

> Then the gods, with the *gandharvas*, and the *siddhas*, the supreme Ṛṣi*s* and the *apsaras*-es, came together from all around in their thousands (*tato devāḥ sagandharvāḥ siddhāś ca paramarṣayaḥ / samantataś cāpsarasaḥ samājagmuḥ sahasraśaḥ* // 82.13)

Jarāsaṃdha is defeated in single combat by Rāma, but a voice from heaven tells the latter that he must not kill his enemy (82.20–1),[41] and hostilities between the two sides go on inconclusively through eighteen battles (82.27).

Once more the revelation of Kṛṣṇa's glory is followed by a period of concealment. Speaking as a prudent general and statesman, he urges the Yādavas to leave Mathurā and found a stronger city. It is thus 'from fear of Jarāsaṃdha' (*Jarāsaṃdhabhayāc* …, 84.35b) that Dvārakā is founded, and the episode which immediately follows in 85, in which Kṛṣṇa flees and hides from Jarāsaṃdha's powerful ally Kālayavana, emphasises the strength of that fear. Yet the planning and construction of Dvārakā (or Dvāravatī) is the work of the gods' architect Viśvakarman (86.22), who addresses Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu (86.23) and performs his bidding. Ocean grants the land upon which the city is to be built (86.36–8). Kṛṣṇa asks the Wind to bring Indra's assembly hall to him, and it is done (86.66–73).

In 84.25 the site of Dvārakā has been described as being ‘as though supported by Śrī’ (*kṚtāspadam iva śriyā*). Soon the stage is set for Śrī's human representative to take up her residence there, when Kṛṣṇa marries Rukmiṇī, the beautiful daughter of King Bhīṣmaka of Vidarbha. As he first sees her, she is compared to Śrī/Lakṣmī (*lakṣmīṃ sākṣād iva*, 87.33; *Śryam agryām iva*, 87.35), thus reinforcing Kṛṣṇa's identity with Viṣṇu. Yet his marriage is presented in terms more appropriate to a human hero than to a divine being. He carries Rukmim off on the day before her wedding to Śiṣupāla (87.41), while Rāma and other Vṛṣṇi warriors fight off her intended bridegroom and his allies. When her brother Rukmin hears what has happened, he follows Kṛṣṇa, with an army (88.1–3). In the ensuing combat he is defeated by Kṛṣṇa, but his life is spared when Rukmiṇī pleads for him (88.27–8).

Kṛṣṇa the champion of the gods

From 91 onwards the story moves in the realm of the gods, and Kṛṣṇa's divinity is openly displayed. Indra himself appears at his court (91.28) with a request for him to kill Naraka, the *asura*-king of Prāgjyotiṣa,[42] who has stolen Aditi's earrings. It has already been stated that ‘it was to kill this Naraka that the great-armed Janārdana, the wielder of conch, discus, mace and sword, was born among the Vṛṣṇis from Devakī and Vasudeva’ (*tadvadhārthaṃ mahābāhuḥ śankhacakragadāsibhṚt / jāto Vṛṣṇiṣu devakyāṃ vasudevāj janārdanaḥ // 91.21*). There is little doubt as to the outcome of the battle, and no attempt to build up tension as in some of the accounts of the younger Kṛṣṇa's struggles. By now he is simply accepted as the gods' invincible champion, as Indra's request indicates.

Once Naraka is dead, Kṛṣṇa inspects the treasures which are now his by right of conquest. Among these are 16,000 beautiful girls, whom Naraka had carried off from *asura* or *gandharva* families (92.23). They tell Kṛṣṇa that Nārada has informed them that they are to be his wives:

> Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, the wielder of conch, disc, sword and mace will become our husband after killing Naraka, the son of Earth (*viṣṇur nārāyano devaḥ śankhacakragadāsibhṚt / sa bhaumaṃ narakaṃ hatvā bhartā ca bhavitā hi saḥ // 92.33*)

It is clear that the girls are in no doubt as to Kṛṣṇa's identity. Again, when he goes with his wife Satyabhāmā[43], to restore Aditi's earrings, the goddess embraces him and Indra as her two sons (92.56a). When Kṛṣṇa uproots and carries off the gods' wonderful *pārijāta* tree. Indra makes no protest, but accepts this as a fait accompli (v.67).[44]

The appearance of Garuḍa as Kṛṣṇa's vehicle from 91.36 onwards[45]

and the frequent descriptions of Kṛṣṇa bearing Viṣṇu's characteristic weapons (91.21; 92.33; 94.11; 97.19) are reminiscent of Viṣṇu in his fight against Kālanemi (32.25; 38.3). By now Kṛṣṇa is plainly seen as identical with Viṣṇu, no longer 'disguised as a cowherd' but clothed in his celestial power. The Dvāravatī to which he returns in 93 is also described as a celestial city. As Kṛṣṇa approaches it on Garuḍa he sees it 'like the home of the gods' (*devasadmapratikāśām*, 93.1). The hearer/reader is reminded that this city was built by Viśvakarman (93.2), who has made it 'like heaven' (*svargasaṃnibhām*, v.4), 'like Indra's Amarāvatī' (… *indrasyāmarāvatī*, v.7).

Kṛṣṇa enters the Yādava assembly in triumph, for now that 'all the enemies of religion are dead, the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇis are victorious' (*hatā brahmadviṣaḥ sarve jayanty andhakavṛṣṇayaḥ*, 95.7a). He apportions his treasures among the Yādava leaders, seating them all upon thrones. They thank him, saying that they admire his generosity even more than his courage and skill in battle (96.4–6). Then the Yādava ladies enter: among them are Devakī, Kṛṣṇa's seven queens (*saptamā devyo*)[46] and Rohiṇī (96.8). 'The two gods, Rāma and Keśava' (*devau … Rāmakeśavau*, v.9)[47] salute their mothers. And with the other ladies comes Nidrā, now said to be Devakī's daughter Ekānaṃśā and thus Kṛṣṇa's sister:

> 11 The two heroes then approached her [i.e. Devakī's] daughter, whom men call Ekānaṃśā, and who can indeed take any form she pleases. 12 The great lord was born at the very same moment as she was, and thanks to her the Great Being killed Kaṃsa and his troops. 13 This girl grew up there, honoured, in the Vṛṣṇis' home. Indeed she was protected like a son then on Vāsudeva's orders. 14 Men call this unique invincible yogic maiden 'Ekānaṃśā', born in order to protect Keśava (11 *tataḥ prāptau narāgryau tu tasyā duhitaraṃ tadā / ekānaṃśeti yām āhur narā vai kāmarūpiṇīm //* 12 *tathā kṣaṇamuhūrtābhyāṃ yayā jajñe maheśvaraḥ*[48] */ yatkṚte sagaṇaṃ Kaṃsaṃ jaghāna puruṣottamaḥ //* 13 *sā kanyā vavṚdhe tatra vṛṣṇisadmani pūjitā / putravat pālyamānā vai vāsudevājñayā tadā //*14 *tām ekām āhur utpannām ekānaṃśeti mānavaḥ / yogakanyāṃ durādharṣāṃ rakṣārthaṃ keśavasya ca //* 96.11–14)

So now as Ekānaṃśā, Nidrā is reunited with the brother for whom she gave her life. The Yādavas honour her (v. 15), Kṛṣṇa and Rāma greet her with affection and respect (vv16–17), and the ladies of the court make offerings to her (v.19). As she sits between her two brothers, she is said to resemble Śrī (v.18).[49]

How is this transformation of Nidrā into Ekānaṃśā to be understood? At the beginning of Kṛṣṇa's story, when Nidrā, as Yaśodā's baby daughter, was killed by Kaṃsa, she was said to become a goddess, so perhaps her reappearance here is to be seen as a theophany. In *Vāyu* 96.213, however, it is stated that Kaṃsa only said that he had killed her, while *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.71.219ā22 goes even further (both texts refer to Ekādaśā, but this is obviously another name for the same person):

219 Then the wicked man gladly let her go free, saying: ‘As she is your daughter, so she is doubtless mine. I shall not kill her, ? strong-armed one; let her go where she will’.[50] 220 The girl grew up there, honoured in the Vrsnis' home, and then the lady joyfully protected the goddess like a son. 221 Thus they said that the creator Kṛṣṇa had been born by this means, and Ekādaśā was born in order to protect Keśava. 222 The Yādavas will worship her with single-mindedness [because] she protected the God of gods, Kṛṣṇa of divine form (219 *atha tām api duṣṣātmā hy utsasarja mudānvitaḥ / tavaiṣā hi yathā kanyā tathā mama na saṃṣayaḥ / na hanmīmāṃ mahābāho vrajatv eṣā yathāruci //* 220 *kanyā sā vavṚdhe tatra Vṛṣṇisadmani pūjitā / putravat pālayāmāsa devī devīṃ mudā tadā //* 221 *tam evaṃ vidhinotpannam āhuḥ kṛṣṇaṃ prajāpatim / Ekādaśā tu jajñe vai rakṣārthaṃ keśavasya ha //* 222 *etāṃ caikāgramanasaḥ pūjayiṣyanti yūdavūḥ / devadevo divyavapuḥ kṛṣṇaḥ saṃrakṣito 'nayā //*)

This tradition is echoed here in the *Harivaṃśa*. Indeed *Hv* 96.13a is almost identical with *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.71.220a, and a passage which the Critical Edition prints as 612* adds this account of how the baby girl grew up among the Vṛṣṇis.

Ekānaṃśā is honoured by the assembly (95.15–19), then the Yādava ladies withdraw, leaving their menfolk to honour Kṛṣṇa (vv20–1). At this point Nārada enters the assembly and begins to address it, as commanded by Indra (96.22). He retells Kṛṣṇa's youthful exploits (96.30–43), the death of Kaṃsa (vv49–63) and Kṛṣṇa's victories over various later enemies (97.1–20). He mentions his triumph over Bali in a previous life (*pūrvadehe* …, 97.21) before telling how he triumphed also over Bali's son Bāṇa (vv22–3).[51] He ends the list of exploits with the death of Naraka (v.29). Finally Nārada praises Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, Sun and Moon (97.36), as ‘the one who always takes pleasure in beings as a child in his toys’ (*modaty eṣa sadā bhūtair bālaḥ krīḍanakair iva*, 97.37),[52] then he returns to heaven. A final chapter enumerates Kṛṣṇa's wives and children, and ‘this is the end of the dynasty’ (*iti vaṃśaḥ samāpyate*, 98.27).

It has been necessary to tell this story at some length, particularly the early episodes, in order to give as many instances as possible of the composers' presentation of Kṛṣṇa as both concealing and revealing his true identity as Viṣṇu. The full revelation occurs when he is seen together with his brother and sister. The fact that the latter is brought upon the stage again only at this point suggests that this really is the climax of the story. When Ekānaṃśā stands between her two brothers and receives the offerings of the Yādavas (96.15–19) there is a sense of completeness as the three are brought together.

KṚṢṆA AND VIṢṆU IN THE *HARIVAṂŚA*

Whereas the *Harivaṃśaparvan* presents the relationship between

Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu in various perspectives, the *Kṛṣṇacarita* contained in the *Viṣṇuparvan* gives a picture which has an underlying consistency, in spite of the changing light and shade playing over it. Of the words which have been used in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* to describe Kṛṣṇa's status in relation to Viṣṇu, *prādurbhāva* and *aṃśa* may be disregarded as far as the *Harivaṃśa*'s basic understanding is concerned. They belong to earlier perspectives which are used in passing, but not built upon. Only *āścarya*, used both of Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu, can be seen as expressing the *Harivaṃśa*'s vision of a balance between the two figures. Kṛṣṇa is fully divine, yet he has no independent reality apart from Viṣṇu. He is the miraculous counterpart which Viṣṇu has created for himself in human terms.

The only possible challenge to the uniqueness of this relationship comes from Kṛṣṇa's brother Saṃkarṣaṇa who is also identified with Viṣṇu in 45.38 and 81.65. This challenge will be examined in some detail in Chapter 9; it is enough to say at this point that Kṛṣṇa's relationship with his brother echoes that between Viṣṇu and Śiva which is typical of all but the most sectarian of the Purāṇas. Although one may be in the ascendant, there is always an acknowledgement that the other is in some sense his equal. As Nārada says in 67.53, after recognising Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu: 'Everything in heaven is dependent upon you alone, yet also upon Tryambaka [i.e. Śiva]' (*tvayy eva kevalaṃ yuktaṃ tridive tryambake 'pi va*). There are strong links between Saṃkarṣaṇa/Śeṣa and Siva,[53] so that it is not difficult to see in this pale companion of the dark Kṛṣṇa[54] a reminder of Śiva's parity with Viṣṇu, even though Viṣṇu still has the lead.

Just as the figure of Śiva is to be perceived behind that of Saṃkarṣaṇa, so the figure of Durgā is behind that of Nidrā/Ekānaṃśā.[55] At various points in her story there are connections with the Goddess who is honoured in the *Devīmāhātmya*. The description of her in *Hv* 40.8,26–33 could be seen as filling out the reference to 'Yoganidrā dwelling in Hari's eyes' (*yoganidrām … harinetrakṚtālayām*) in *DM* 1.70. The Dānavas whom Kṛṣṇa predicts in 47.49 that she will kill, and to whom Kaṃsa also refers in 65.41, are the Sumbha and Nisumbha who are Durgā's enemies in *DM* 5–10.[56] As with Saṃkarṣaṇa/Śiva, so Nidrā/Ekānaṃśā/Durgā is depicted in a complementary relationship with Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu. He is dependent upon her, yet she is subordinate to him and assists him in the execution of his plans. Thus when Kṛṣṇa, Saṃkarṣaṇa and Ekānaṃśā are brought together in 96.12–19 the trio suggests a union of Viṣṇu, Siva and Devī. All three, not Viṣṇu alone, have their unique terrestrial counterparts in the *Harivaṃśa*.

Although Ingalls admired the literary merits of the *Harivaṃśa*'s

Kṛṣṇacarita he judged its author to be 'not much of a theologian'.[57] In a sense this is true. The *Kṛṣṇacarita* is not trying to make any particular point as to whether the Supreme God is to be worshipped as Viṣṇu or as Kṛṣṇa. But it would be a mistake if Ingalls' judgement should be taken to imply that the *Harivaṃśa* is a naïve text which is simply concerned to tell an exciting story. By focusing now upon Viṣṇu and now upon Kṛṣṇa, now upon concealment and now upon revelation, by relating Kṛṣṇa not only to Viṣṇu but also to Śiva and to Devī it raises questions about him which are asked again, and given differing answers, by the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata*.

Chapter Four

The all-pervading Viṣṇu

Comparing the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, J. N. Farquhar said that the two ‘must be considered together’ because:

> The *Harivaṃśa* clearly cannot be dated later than A.D. 400, and the *Vishṇu P.* is so like it in most of its features that it is probable that it belongs to the same general date.[1]

Yet in fact to turn from the *Harivaṃśa* to the *Viṣṇu* is to find oneself in a different world. Although Book 5 which contains its *Kṛṣṇacarita* is the longest of its six books and plainly owes much to the *Harivaṃśa*, the *purāṇa* as a whole shows no great concern with Kṛṣṇa. It is Viṣṇu whom it celebrates as the al1-pervading deity, identical with *brahman*, both transcendent and immanent. Moreover, it claims no connection with the *Mahābhārata*, so that in hearing or reading it one leaves the world of the Epic and enters fully into the world of the Purāṇas.[2]

THE IDEAL *PURĀṆA?*

Since Horace Hayman Wilson translated the *Viṣṇu* in 1840, the idea has persisted that it has a special place among the Purāṇas.[3] Wilson himself not only declared it to be the ‘Purāṇa which most closely conforms to the definition of a Pancha-lakshana Purāṇa …’,[4] but obviously felt that it was so close to this definition that its translation would render unnecessary that of any other *purāṇa*.[5]

Yet there is nothing in the *Viṣṇu* itself, or in any other *purāṇa*, to suggest that within its own genre it ever held such a special place. There is no known list of *purāṇas*, for instance, which singles out the *Viṣṇu* from all the others. Indeed, one of the singular features of the purāṇic tradition is that all the eighteen which are designated as *mahāpurāṇas* appear to be treated as being on exactly the same level as each other. *Matsya* 53.4 speaks of a *purāṇam ekam*, but this was not

an *Ur-purāṇa* which could be reconstituted from any extant text or texts. It was a celestial reality, known only to the gods, and no one existing *purāṇa* was thought to represent it any more faithfully than any other.

The privileged position accorded to the *Viṣṇu* by Wilson and those who followed him was reinforced, from the beginning of this century at least, by the recognition that this *purāṇa* is a structured and unified composition. Pargiter described it as 'composed as a single whole upon a consistent plan',[6] while Winternitz said, 'Its character is more that of a unified composition than that of a mere compilation, which is the case with most of the other Purāṇas'.[7] This orderly structure is another example of purāṇic creative compilation. An examination of the texts assembled by Kirfel in *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa* and other works suggests that a good deal of the *Viṣṇu* shares a common source with other purāṇic passages. The whole of Book 4, for instance, appears to be a prose paraphrase of earlier verse genealogies and legends, and Book 5 is almost certainly based on the *Harivaṃśa*.

What gives the *Viṣṇu* its unity is the way in which it has stamped its own theology upon the purāṇic material. It presents a picture of the universe as entirely dependent upon Viṣṇu. A brief look at the contents of the *Viṣṇu* will show this to be so. Book 1 is mainly an account of creation and of some of the heroes of remote ages. Although Brahmā, Dakṣa and Kaśyapa play their usual role of *prajāpati*, it is made clear throughout that it is Viṣṇu who is the ultimate origin of all things. The first chapter ends:

> From Viṣṇu was the universe produced and in him [lit.there] it exists; he brings about the preservation and the destruction of this universe, and he is the universe, (*viṣṇoḥ sakāśād udbhūtaṃ jagat tatraiva ca sthitam / sthtitisaṃyamakartāsau jagato 'sya jagac ca saḥ* // 1.1.31)

Moreover the stories of early heroes which are included here seem to have been chosen with a view to drawing attention to Viṣṇu's self-revelation on behalf of the world or of some individual, e.g.: 1.11–12, Viṣṇu reveals himself to Dhruva; 1.13, Viṣṇu's *aṃśa* PṚthu subdues the earth for mankind's benefit; 1.15, Viṣṇu appears to the Pracetas brothers; 1.17–20 Viṣṇu protects Prahlāda and eventually reveals himself to him.

A large part of Books 2 and 3 is spent on describing the forms in which Viṣṇu manifests himself in space and time. Book 2 gives a detailed cosmography, with Viṣṇu at the centre of the universe as the personification of sacrifice (*yajñapuruṣa*, 2.3.21), in the lowest depths as Śeṣa (2.5.13), and in the utmost heights as the Śiśumāra constellation in 2.9.1–6 and as the sun in 2.10–11. It also gives the

story of Bharata (2.13–16), presumably because it is from him that the land of Bhārata, which is central to the cosmographie chapters, derives its name. He fails at first to attain *mokṣa* because obsessive concern for a young deer distracts him from devotion to Viṣṇu, but achieves it two lives later when, as a brahmin, he teaches a king that Acyuta is the universe and all beings (2.16.23). 3.1–2 contains information about the *manvantaras* over which Viṣṇu 'presides as a divinity' (*devatvenādhiṣṣhati*, 3.1.35), and the *yugas* which have their characteristic form of Viṣṇu (3.2.54–8). Book 3 also describes Viṣṇu's activity in the form of Vyāsa (*viṣṇuvyāsarūpī*, 3.3.5), his power to save his *bhaktas* from Yama (3.7), and the life according to *varṇāśrama-dharma* which is pleasing to him (3.8–16). Finally it stresses the necessity for avoiding the Jain and Buddhist heresies, which were brought into the world by Viṣṇu himself in order to subvert the *asuras*.

Book 4 presents a pageant of kings and heroes, including many through whom Viṣṇu has been active (e.g. 4.1.90–1; 4.2.26; 4.4.12; 4.4.87; 4.7.36), and Book 5 goes to the central point of that pageant, when Viṣṇu himself descends to earth as Kṛṣṇa, attended by crowds of lesser celestial beings (cf. 4.15.48; 5.7.39–40). Lastly Book 6 deals with the *naimittika* and *prāk*Ṛ*ta* types of dissolution of the universe,[8] brought about by 'the eternal Lord Viṣṇu wearing the form of Rudra' (*bhagavān viṣṇū rudrarūpadharo 'vyayaḥ*, 6.3.16), ending with a description of the *ātyantika* type of dissolution, i.e. the *yogin*'s liberation from *saṃsāra*. In the last chapter of Book 6 the same note is sounded that was heard in 1.1.31:

> He is everything, knowing everything, having the form of everything, yet void of form, Lord Viṣṇu proclaimed here as destroying evil (*sa sarvaḥ sarvavit sarvasvarūpo rūpavarjitaḥ / bhagavān kīrtito viṣṇur atra pāpapranāśanaḥ //* 6.8.27)

In spite of the impression of unity which the *Viṣṇu* gives, the *Kṛṣṇacarita* of Book 5 appears not to be an integral part of it. In the whole of Maitreya's comprehensive list of questions at the beginning of the *purāṇa* (1.1.4–11) Kṛṣṇa is never so much as mentioned. There would be no noticeable gap between Books 4 and 6 if Book 5 were missing. Indeed in some respects there would be greater continuity, since 4.24 takes the narrative up to the Kali age which Book 6 begins by describing. Moreover, when Maitreya sums up in 6.1.1 what Parāśara has already told him, there is again no mention of Kṛṣṇa. The fact that *Viṣṇu* 5 is almost identical (although with some significant differences) with *Brahma* 181–212[9] may perhaps indicate that this *Kṛṣṇacarita* had an independent existence before it was incorporated into either *purāṇa*.[10]

The choice of Parāśara as narrator provides an interesting comment

upon the *Viṣṇu* in comparison with the *Harivaṃśa*. Whereas the latter, by being told by Vaiśaṃpāyana, is obviously claiming to continue from where the *Mahābhārata* left off, it would seem as though the former is making a different claim. The fact that its narrator is Vyāsa's father, Parāśara, suggests that this *purāṇa* is older than Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* and therefore possesses greater authority than it. Moreover this *purāṇa* originated, not at Janamejaya's incomplete snake sacrifice, but at an earlier interrupted sacrifice which Parāśara, like Janamejaya, had performed in order to destroy the race of which a member had killed his father (in this case the race of *rākṣasas*), but which his grandfather Vasiṣṣha had ordered him to stop before all the *rākṣasas* were killed (*Viṣṇu* 1.1.13–22a). The contents of the *purāṇa* which is about to follow, says Parāśara, were granted to him as a boon by Pulastya (1.1.26), the ancestor of the *rākṣasas*, and endorsed by his own ancestor Vasiṣṣha (1.1.28). So just as Parāśara belongs to an earlier time than his son Vyāsa, his recital of this *purāṇa* has links with an avenging sacrifice which was earlier than Janamejaya's.

However much the choice of Parāśara as narrator of the *Viṣṇu* may be seen as adding to the *purāṇa*'s authority, it is important to realise that this authority is in no way dependent upon any claim to represent the purāṇic genre as a whole as a typical or 'ideal' text. It is what distinguishes the *Viṣṇu* from other *purāṇas*, its unique theological emphasis, which makes it important, not the fact that its content has much in common with other texts. In its list of the eighteen chief *purāṇas*, the *Viṣṇu* describes itself in these terms:

> 26 This *purāṇa* which I am declaring to you, Maitreya, is called after Viṣṇu and follows the *Pādma. 27 In sarga, pratisarga*, *vaṃśa, manvantara* and the rest — in all these the Lord Viṣṇu is declared, O most venerable one (26 *yad etat tava maitreya purāṇaṃ kathyate mayā / etad vaiṣṇavasaṃjñaṃ vai pādmasya samanantaram // 27 sarge ca pratisarge ca vaṃśamanvantarādiṣu / kathyate bhagavān viṣṇur aśeṣeṣv eva sattama //* 3.6.26–7)

This suggests that for the *Viṣṇu*, the five traditional topics are important, not in themselves, but because they can be treated as contexts in which Viṣṇu's greatness is extolled. It is indeed this praise of Viṣṇu which runs through the whole text: there are many passages[11] where the presence of a refrain indicates the *stotra* character of the material,[12] and the abundance of prayers, thanksgivings and eulogies is an expression of its distinguishing theological emphasis.

VIṢṆU AS THE SUPREME REALITY

The assertion of Viṣṇu's identity with the universe, and with *brahman*, the Supreme Reality, has been made before in the *Mahābhārata*.[13]

What is new in the *Viṣṇu* is that this is not simply one strand of theology among others, but a deliberate and consistent redactional emphasis which characterises the whole *purāṇa*. This may be seen in the way in which the *Viṣṇu* puts its own stamp upon so much of the *pañcalakṣaṇa* and *bhuvanavinyāsa*[14] material which it shares with other *purāṇas;* e.g. only in *Viṣṇu* 1.13.45 is PṚthu recognised as an *aṃśa* of Viṣṇu; only the *Viṣṇu* has forms of Viṣṇu for the four *yugas* (3.2.54–8); only the *Viṣṇu* identifies Rāma/Baladeva (4.1.65–96) or Purāñjaya (4.2.26) with Viṣṇu.[15] Viṣṇu is firmly equated with *brahman* from the very beginning of the text. In 1.2.12–13 Parāśara states:

> 12 Because he is everywhere, and everything dwells in him, he is called Vāsudeva by the wise. 13 He is that supreme *brahman*, eternal, unborn, imperishable, undecaying, one by nature, and always pure because free from imperfection (12 *sarvatrāsau samastam ca vasaty atreti vai yataḥ / tataḥ sa vāsudeveti vidvadbhiḥ paripaṣhyate //* 13 *tad brahma paramaṃ nityam ajam akṣayam avyayam / ekasvarūpaṃ tu sadā heyābhāvāc ca nirmalam //*)

From then on Viṣṇu's identity with *brahman* is emphasised constantly. It is stated rather than argued, but such arguments as one might draw from the statements are based mainly on the ideas that Viṣṇu/Vāsudeva[16] has the same characteristics as *brahman* (cf. also 1.2.27–9; 1.15.57), and that oneness with *brahman* is achieved through intentness upon Viṣṇu (1.4.18; 1.11.46; 1.20.26–7; 1.22.53–4; 6.4.38, 6.5.68). Thus Viṣṇu is not only the Supreme God, a term which could be taken to mean simply the chief among many divine forms, but the Supreme Reality which is beyond and within all forms. Either *brahman* or Viṣṇu may be used as the name of that power which maintains the universe and of which the universe consists (1.2.27–9; 2.7.41–2; 6.7.60).

As *brahman* Viṣṇu has two modes:[17]

> 55 There are two forms of that *brahman*, that which is material and that which is immaterial. These two forms, one perishable and one imperishable, permeate all beings. 56a The imperishable is the supreme *brahman*, the perishable is this whole universe (55 *dve rūpe brahmaṇas tasya mūrtaṃ cāmūrtam eva ca / kṣarākṣarasvarūpe te sarvabhūteṣv avasthite //* 56a *akṣaraṃ tat paraṃ brahma kṣaraṃ sarvam idaṃ jagat /* 1.22.55–6a)[18]

He is all-pervading (*sarvavyāpin*, 1.12.58; 1.18.39). His name Viṣṇu is explained in 3.1.45 as referring to the belief that 'the Great Self's power has entered the universe (… *viṣṣam idaṃ viśvaṃ tasya śaktyā mahātmanaḥ*)', while in 6.5.82 he is said to be called Vāsudeva 'because he dwells in [all] beings and they dwell in him' (*bhūteṣu vasate so 'ntarvasanty atra ca tāni yat*, cf. 1.2.12). He is within all things, can assume all forms, and is the animating principle within all beings (1.7.46; 1.12.72; 1.19.38). He is thus not only *brahman*, the ultimate reality underlying the universe, but also *paramātman*, the

Supreme Self of all beings (e.g. 1.2.1; 1.19.37; 3.3.28; 6.4.38). He can therefore be identified with the universe as the Self of all beings (*sarvabhūtātmā*, 1.2.69; 1.19.37), the All-Self (*sarvātmā*, 1.12.41; 3.17.30; *akhilātmaka*ḥ, 2.2.52).

Viṣṇu's identification with the universe does not mean that his being is equivalent only to the sum total of all beings. He is utterly transcendent, beyond all thought and knowledge, all categories of time and space. Again and again it is stated that Viṣṇu is the source of the universe, the power which sustains it, and its dissolution. On behalf of his fellow gods Brahmā prays to him thus:

> [I bow before him] in whom everything exists, from whom everything has originated, who was before me, the god who is all beings and who is the supreme of supremes (*yatra sarvam yata*ḥ *sarvam utpanna*ṃ *matpura*ḥ*saram / sarvabhūtaś ca yo deva*ḥ *parāṇām api ya*ḥ *para*ḥ // 1.9.42)

Prahlāda praises him:

> OṂ glory to Viṣṇu, glory to him again and again, in whom everything exists, from whom it originates, who is everything and the resting place of all things (*OṂ namo viṣṇave tasmai namas tasmai puna*ḥ *puna*ḥ */ yatra sarva*ṃ *yata*ḥ *sarva*ṃ *ya*ḥ *sarva*ṃ *sarvasaṃśrayah* // 1.19.84)

Parāśara takes up the same theme at the end of his description of the universe in Book 2:

> And this Viṣṇu is the supreme *brahman* from whom this whole universe originates, who is the universe, in whom it exists and in whom it will be absorbed (*sa ca viṣṇu*ḥ *param brahma yata*ḥ *sarvam ida*ṃ *jagat / jagac ca yo yatra ceda*ṃ *yasmiṃś ca layam esyati* // 2.7.41)

Sometimes the same idea is expressed in terms of the *trimūrti* (e.g. in 1.2.2; 1.2.66; 1.4.15; 1.19.66; 2.11.12–13; 4.1.85), but it is obvious that when the name Viṣṇu occurs in this context it is no longer referring to the Supreme Reality, but to a lower manifestation which is on the same level as Śiva and Brahmā. The Viṣṇu who is identical with the supreme *brahman* contains the powers of creation, maintenance and destruction within himself and is above them all (cf. 1.7.46; 1.9.36).

There is no suggestion that Viṣṇu as personal is in any sense inferior to the impersonal *brahman*. The identification is complete, so that the visions of Dhruva and Prahlāda give them access to the Supreme Reality. When Dhruva sees Viṣṇu before him, 'holding conch, discus, mace, the *śārṅga* bow and an excellent sword' (*śaṅkhacakragadāśārṅgavarāsidharam* …, 1.12.45), he praises him as the universe and as *brahman*:

> 53 I bow to him whose form is earth, water, fire, wind, space, *manas* and *buddhi, ahamkāra*, primal *prakṚti;* 54 who is the pure, subtle, all-pervading puruṣa beyond

pradhāna. Glory to him, the *puruṣa* who absorbs the *guṇas*, 55 whose form is the eternal one of earth and the other gross elements, and smell and the other subtle elements; the one who is beyond *buddhi* and the rest, even beyond *pradhāna* and *puruṣa*. 56 I have taken refuge, supreme Lord, with your pure form, which is the Self identical with *brahman*, the master of the whole universe. 57 Glory be to the form which is called *brahman* because it is both great and productive of greatness, contemplated by *yogins*, unchanging, O self of all (53 *bhūmir āpo 'nolo vāyuḥ khaṃ mano buddhir eva ca / bhūtādir ādiprakṚtir yasya rūpaṃ nato 'smi tarn //* 54 *śuddhaḥ sūkṣmo 'khilavyāpī pradhānāt parataḥ pumān / yasya rūpaṃ namas tasmai puruṣāya guṇāśine //* 55 *bhūrādīnāṃ samastānāṃ gandhādīnāṃ ca śāśvataḥ / buddhyādīnāṃ pradhāṇasya puruṣasya ca yaḥ paraḥ //* 56 *taṃ brahmabhūtam ātmānam aśeṣajagataḥ patim / prapadye śaraṇaṃ śuddhaṃ tvadrūpaṃ parameśvara //* 57 *bṚhattvād bṚṃhaṇatvāc ca yad rūpaṃ brahmasaṃjñitam / tasmai namaste sarvātman yogicintyāvikāriṇe //* 1.12.53–7)

The form of Viṣṇu seen by Dhruva and Prahlāda is perhaps the same as the cosmic form which is said to be an object of yogic meditation in 1.22.61–75, and which is introduced as '*brahman*'s own supreme form' (*svarūpaṃ brahmaṇaḥ param*, v.61). Parāśara explains to his questioner Maitreya that the weapons and ornaments of this form represent the constituent elements of the universe, together with wisdom and ignorance (1.22.75). This form is described again in 6.7.70b-92 as part of Keśidhvaja's teaching about the final dissolution which is the result of the *yogin*'s discipline.

The God of the *Viṣṇu* is one who is most appropriately described in negative language or in paradoxes. Hacker refers to both these types of language in his analysis of the Prahlāda legend in *Viṣṇu* 1.16–20.[19] He points to the frequent use of negative predications (*acintya, nirmala/ amala, ananta, anādi, anādimadhyānta, aja, avṚddhikṣaya*, the name Acyuta, *anapāyin, avyaya*) and to the paradoxes in Prahlāda's prayers to Viṣṇu, especially in his thanksgiving of 1.20.9–13, which consists almost entirely of statements of Viṣṇu's paradoxical attributes — statements which, as Hacker says, 'display the idea that Viṣṇu is both in the world … and also beyond it, that he both produces and rules the world and also remains totally unaffected by it'.[20] This language is not confined to the Prahlāda episode. In every book of the *Viṣṇu, aja* and *avyaya* occur as epithets of Viṣṇu, sometimes, as in 1.2.7 and 1.9.51, combined with *akṣaya. Brahman*, identified with Viṣṇu in 6.5.68 is described as:

> That which is unmanifest, unaging, inconceivable, unborn, undecaying, indescribable, without form and without hands or feet or anything else (*yat tad avyaktam ajaram acintyam ajam avyayam / anirdeśyam arūpaṃ ca pāṇipādādyasaṃyutam //* 6.5.66)

As for paradoxes, in 1.4.24a Viṣṇu is described as 'the Supreme Being, material and immaterial, invisible and visible' (*mūrtāmūrtam adṚśyaṃ ca dṚśyaṃ ca puruṣottamam*) and in 1.9.50 he is 'the enjoyer and what is enjoyed, the creator and the creation, having the form of both effect and agent' (*bhoktāraṃ bhogyabhūtaṃ ca sraṣṣāraṃ sṚjyam eva ca / kāryakartṚsvarūpam* …; cf.4.1.89). In 2.7.42 he is said to be *sadasat*.

3.3.29 is also typical:

> The Lord is this *brahman* which is divided threefold[21] yet is undivided; although he remains the same in all differences, those whose minds perceive differences divide him (*etad brahma tridhā bhedam abhedam api sa prabhuḥ / sarvabhedeṣv abhedo 'sau bhidyate bhinnabuddhibhiḥ //*)

As Hacker says, the paradoxes are intended primarily to point towards the nature of Viṣṇu's relation to the universe; within it and yet beyond it, responsible for it and yet outside its reach.

This paradoxical relationship is not only stated in the more philosophical language of the prayers and eulogies. It is expressed in stories and images also, and nowhere more clearly than in the account of the churning of the ocean (1.9.1–39). Viṣṇu is at once deeply involved in this episode and yet regarded as transcending it all. When Brahmā asks him, in the name of all the gods, to restore the prosperity (*Śrī*) which the universe has lost because of Indra's discourtesy to Durvāsas,[22] he accentuates in his prayer the way in which the Supreme God transcends the world of lesser divinities and other beings. He prays to him 'whose universal power abides in a part of his ten thousand times ten-thousandth part' (*yasyāyutāyutāṃśāṃśe viśvaśaktir iya*ṃ *sthitā*, 1.9.53).[23]

Yet this transcendent God involves himself at all levels in the enterprise of churning the ocean for the lost Śrī and the other treasures which it contains. He assumes the form of a tortoise to serve as the base for Mt Mandara as it functions as a churning-stick for the ocean (v.88), yet he is also at the summit of the mountain (v.90). He gives his energy to the serpent Vāsuki to act as the rope for the great churning-stick (v.91). In one form he is in the midst of the *devas* (v.89a) — the epithet *cakragadādhara*ḥ here suggests that this may be his familiar four-armed form — and in another he is present among the *asuras* (v. 89b). Viṣṇu infuses his energy into all the participants of the churning, even though he has just been proclaimed as far beyond them all. He is central, all-pervasive and transcendent.[24]

THE BASIC FORMS OF VIṢṆU

The story of the churning of the ocean is a reminder that Viṣṇu's forms manifest themselves at different levels. His identification with *brahman* is the eternal background upon which the *purāṇa*'s genealogies, cosmography, myths and legends are projected, yet at the same time, his forms are to be found at the basic level of the essential components of the universe, at the cosmic level, and at the level of human history. At the basic level Viṣṇu's forms are beyond human comprehension, but at the cosmic and human level, to be discussed

later, they provide men and women with the recognisable figures and lively stories which they need as focal points for their worship. These levels of manifestation will now be explored.

In two passages from Book 1, Viṣṇu's nature is said to be fourfold. The first of these is 1.2.14–31,[25] which describes the four basic forms of Viṣṇu (*puruṣa, pradhāna*, the manifest [i.e. the universe] and time), which make up the ultimate fabric of the universe. They have the paradoxical quality which belongs to all the forms of Viṣṇu which are encountered in this *purāṇa*. On the one hand they are fully identified with the Supreme God, but on the other hand he transcends them, entering into them in order to use them, so that the identification depends upon his will. 1.2.14–18 explains these forms:[26]

> 14 That (i.e. *brahman*) is everything, having the form of both manifest and unmanifest, and thus existing in the form of *puruṣa* and in the form of time. 15 *Puruṣa* is the first form of the supreme *brahman*, O twice-born, the manifest and the unmanifest [i.e. p*radhāna*] are two other forms, and time is the last. 16 The Supreme which is [made up] of *pradhāna, puruṣa*, the manifest and time, the learned see as the pure and supreme state of Viṣṇu. 17 *Pradhāna, puruṣa*, the manifest and time are separately the forms which are the causes of the existence of the phenomena of maintenance, creation and destruction. 18 Viṣṇu is the manifest and the unmanifest, *puruṣa* and time. Learn his behaviour as he plays like a little boy (14 *tad eva sarvam evaitad vyaktāvyaktasvarūpavat / tathā puruṣarūpeṇa kālarūpeṇa ca sthitam //* 15 *parasya brahmaṇo rūpaṃ puruṣaḥ prathamaṃ dvija / vyaktāvyakte tathaivānye rūpe kālas tathā param //* 16 *pradhānapuruṣavyaktakālānāṃ paramaṃ hi yat / paśyanti sūrayaḥ śuddhaṃ tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam //* 17 *pradhānapuruṣavyaktakālas tu pravibhāgaśaḥ / rūpāṇi sthiti-sargāntavyaktisadbhāvahetavaḥ //* 18 *vyaktaṃ viṣṇus tathāvyak-taṃ puruṣaḥ kāla eva ca / krīḍato bālakasyeva ceṣṭāṃ tasya niśāmaya //* 1.2.14–18)

These forms of Viṣṇu/*brahman* are expressed in the language of Sāṃkhya. It is not the terminology of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, for *kāla* as a *tattva* is unknown to the latter.[27] It is not essentially theistic language, although it is given a theistic direction by the identification of the four basic *tattvas* with Viṣṇu/*brahman*. Although they are his four forms, they do not exhaust his being. As 1.2.28–30 makes clear, the reality which can be called *brahman, paramātman*, Supreme Lord (*parameśvara*) or Hari brings about creation because it chooses to do so, using *puruṣa* and *prakṚti* as its instruments. Even though it is said to enter into them, the indirect nature of its action detaches it from them (v.30). The four forms will now be examined more closely.

Viṣṇu as *puruṣa*

In 1.2 and other similar passages (e.g. 1.12.54–5; 2.7.32; 6.4.39), *puruṣa* is used more or less in the Sāṃkhya sense of 'principle of consciousness',[28] which comes into juxtaposition with *prakṚti/ pradhāna* and so brings the universe into being. Therefore Viṣṇu is

never equated simply with *puruṣa* alone, because the *Viṣṇu* is too concerned to show that he is everything that is. The only term which can be fully equated with Viṣṇu is *brahman*. Therefore *puruṣa* in this sense can only be used as the name of one of the components of the Supreme Reality It cannot stand for that Reality itself.[29]

Viṣṇu as *pradhāna/avyakta*

In Sāṃkhya *pradhāna* and *avyakta* are synonymous with *mūlaprak*Ṛ*ti*, the primal materiality from which the universe emanates. They are used in this sense here and elsewhere in the *Viṣṇu* (cf. *pradhāna* in 2.7.22–44). There is one place in the *purāṇa* where this primal materiality appears at first sight to be hypostatised as a goddess, Viṣṇu's *śakti*. After praising Viṣṇu as *puruṣottama*, Prahlāda continues:

> 76 Glory to that eternal one who exists in all beings as your other power, the abode of the *guṇas*, O All-Self, Lord of the gods. 77 I praise her who is outside the range of the senses, beyond the distinctions of speech or thought, to be defined [only] by the wisdom of the wise, the supreme goddess (76 *sarvabhūteṣu sarvātman yā śaktir aparā tava / guṇāśrayā namas tasyai śāśvatāyai sureśvara / /* 77 *yātītagocarā vācāṃ manasāṃ cāviśeṣanā / jñānijñānaparicchedyā tāṃ vande sveśvarīṃ parām //* 1.19.76–7)

Although this language is very like that which might be applied to a god's consort, it is so out of keeping with other uses of the word *śakti* in the *Viṣṇu* that it is probably better to follow Wilson's interpretation and see it as addressed to Viṣṇu as *pradhāna*, after vv74–5 have been addressed to him as *puruṣa*.[30] In 2.7.29–30 Viṣṇu's *śakti* is clearly differentiated from *prak*Ṛ*ti/ pradhāna*, since it is said to envelop both *pradhāna* and *puruṣa* (cf. 2.7.32) and appears to be regarded as higher than either of them. It seems that throughout the *Viṣṇu prak*Ṛ*ti/ pradhāna* is regarded as a component element of Viṣṇu himself rather than as a power which can be hypostatised as a quasi-autonomous being.

Viṣṇu as *vyakta*

Viṣṇu's identification with the manifest universe has already been considered. It has been made clear that this is never the kind of identification in which the terms are completely interchangeable. Viṣṇu is the universe, but he is also more than the universe. The universe is Viṣṇu, but only because he has deliberately willed to identify himself with it.

Viṣṇu as time

Again, Viṣṇu is both identical with time (cf. 1.2.26–7; 1.3.6; 1.6.14;

1.22.79; 4.1.84) and yet beyond time, 'without beginning, middle or end' (*anādimadhyāntam* …, 1.17.15; cf. 3.7.27; 4.2.128; 6.8.59).[31] As time, he is said to bring together *puruṣa* and *pradhāna* so that the cosmos can emerge, and also to separate them (1.2.24). In 1.6.14–31 time is said to be that aspect (*aṃśa*) of Viṣṇu which has caused the moral deterioration of the human race.

Of the four basic forms of Viṣṇu which are mentioned in 1.2, time is the only one which occurs again in the second passage which speaks of Viṣṇu's four forms, 1.22.22–42. Here the fourfold nature of the Supreme God is linked with his three operations of creation, maintenance and destruction. In each operation he has four forms: firstly that of the *trimūrti* deity responsible for the operation, secondly that of a subordinate figure who represents the type of activity associated with the operation;[32] thirdly time; and fourthly all beings. Thus in creation he is Brahma, Marīci and his fellow Ṛṣi*s*, time and all beings (1.22.24–5). In maintenance he is Viṣṇu, Manu and others,[33] time and all beings (1.22.26–7). In destruction he is Rudra, 'the fire of the end and other destroyers' (*agnyantakādi*), time and all beings (1.22.28–9). These four forms of the Supreme God are described as 'manifestations of his power' (*vibhūtayo harer*, 1.22.31; *viṣṇor … vibhūtaya*ḥ, 1.22.32; *janārdanavibhūtaya*ḥ, 1.22.33).

It is interesting to see the way in which this fourfoldness, so often associated with Vaiṣṇavism (e.g. in the four forms of Kṛṣṇa in *Mbh* 7.28.22–6, the four sons of Dharma of *Mbh* 12.321.8–10, the four *prādurbhāvas* of *Mbh* 12.337.35–6, the four-faced Vaikuntha or Caturmūrti images,[34] the four members of the *vyūha* system,[35] the four sons of Daśaratha[36]), is combined here with the threefold scheme of the *trimūrti*. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra direct creation, maintenance and destruction, but in each case they work as part of a fourfold manifestation of Viṣṇu/*brahman*.

However much fourfoldness may be a characteristic of Vaiṣṇava mythology, there is possibly a fifth basic form of Viṣṇu which is mentioned frequently throughout the *purāṇa*. This is his energy or *śakti*, already discussed briefly in connection with Prahlāda's praises in 1.19.76–7. The word *śakti* is, of course, feminine, and is often used of a god's consort, but this interpretation does not seem to be what is intended by the *Viṣṇu*. Śrī/Lakṣmī is an important figure in 1.8–9, and in 1.9.126 she is said to pervade the universe along with Viṣṇu. Yet the only occurrence of the word *śakti* in these chapters is at 1.8.29, as part of a long list of complementary objects or qualities which are identified with Viṣṇu and Śrī: 'the bearer of the mace is resistance, Lakṣmī is power, O best of brahmins' (*avaṣṣambho gadāpāṇi*ḥ *śaktir lakṣmīr dvijottama*). In Indra's praise of Lakṣmī recovered from the

Ocean of Milk (1.9.117–33) the word *śakti* never appears.

In 2.10–11 *śakti* occurs frequently in connection with the sun and the seven attendants, changing each month, who staff the solar chariot. Indeed, the sun itself is said to be Viṣṇu's *śakti* (2.11.9,11) — clearly his power or energy rather than his consort. In other contexts in the *Viṣṇu*, however, Viṣṇu's *śakti* is not identified with any visible symbol. It is simply the power by which he creates and pervades the universe (cf. 6.7.60). In 3.1.45 it is connected with the etymology of Viṣṇu's name:

> Because the Great Self's power has entered the universe, therefore he is called Viṣṇu from the root *viś*, indicating penetration (*yasmād viṣṣam idaṃ viśvaṃ tasya śaktyā mahātmanaḥ / tasmād sa procyate viṣṇur viśer dhatoḥ praveśanāt //*)

Elsewhere 'the power of the supreme *brahman*' (*parasya brahmaṇaḥ śaktis*) is said to fill all beings (1.22.56; cf. 6.7.60), and in the Sāṃkhya cosmology of 2.7.22–44 it is said to encompass both *prakṚti* and *puruṣa* and to influence the whole universe through them (vv29b-32a).

It would seem then that Viṣṇu's *śakti* is to be regarded neither as his consort nor as a clearly delineated form of the Supreme God. It has been necessary to discuss it here because these references to power and energy are related to the basic forms of Viṣṇu in being part of the means by which the Supreme Reality informs and regulates the universe. It enables Viṣṇu's pervasion of the universe to operate as a dynamic power at work maintaining all things, not simply as a static presence within it, but it is not associated with any particular form.

THE FORMS OF VIṢṆU MANIFEST IN THE COSMOS

At the beginning of this study it was noted that human beings feel the need for a god who is at once transcendent and accessible. The forms of Viṣṇu which have been considered so far do little to make him accessible. Not only does his supreme form transcend the universe, but his basic forms operate at a level which goes deeper than human perception can penetrate. Immanence does not necessarily imply a cosy intimacy between the divine and the human, and the reality undergirding the universe is a mystery, whether it is symbolised by the language of height or depth, beyond or within. Within the universe as it manifests itself, Viṣṇu is all-pervading (*sarvavyāpin*, 1.12.58; cf. *sarvātmā*, 1.4.9; 3.17.30; 5.1.32; 6.4.8). All beings, however much they may appear to have their own individual identities, are really forms of Viṣṇu (3.17.14–30; 5.1.16–20,29–30).

But few worshippers can feel satisfied with a God who is everywhere, everything and everyone. The devotee needs to be told where he or she can encounter the Supreme in some distinctive form. Thus Viṣṇu appears in the cosmos in a wide variety of forms which can be recognised and worshipped.

Viṣṇu in space and time

The first place to look for such forms is in the cosmography of Book 2. The picture of the universe which is given is that which is customarily found in the *purāṇas*:[37] a series of six island-continents (*dvīpas*) extending in concentric circles around a seventh called Jambūdvīpa, which is divided into various regions (*varṣas*).[38] It is also extended vertically in space, upwards through a series of 'worlds' (*lokas*) and downwards through a series of 'levels' (*tolas*). Everywhere there appears some form of Viṣṇu, regulating and maintaining the universe. His form for Bhārata is the tortoise, but there are other animal forms for some of the other *varṣas* of Jambūdvīpa:

> 50 In Bhadrāśva Lord Viṣṇu is present in horse-headed form, O brahmin; in Ketumāla as a boar, and in Bhārata he has the form of a tortoise; 51 as Govinda in fish form Janārdana is present among the Kurus; in his cosmic form the omnipresent Hari is all things everywhere (50 *bhadrāśve bhagavān viṣṇur āste hayaśirā dvija / varāhaḥ ketumāle tu bhārate kūrmarūpadhṚk* // 51 *matsya-rūpaś ca govindaḥ kuruṣv āste janārdanaḥ / viśvarūpeṇa sarvatra sarvaḥ sarvatrago hariḥ* // 2.2.50–1)[39]

This alignment of animal forms of Viṣṇu with various *varṣas* is not peculiar to the *Viṣṇu;* there is a parallel passage in *Mārkaṇḍeya* 54.31. But the *Mārkaṇḍeya* passage says nothing about the omnipresence of Viṣṇu's cosmic form.

To the purāṇic cosmography, the *Viṣṇu* adds the thought that a form of Viṣṇu is worshipped in each *dvīpa*.[40] In the central island-continent of Jambūdvīpa, Viṣṇu is worshipped as the *yajñapuruṣa*, the personification of sacrifice (2.3.21), a title which has already been used for him several times in Book 1 (1.4.23; 1.11.48; 1.13.18,28). Moving out from this centre, Viṣṇu is worshipped as Soma in Plakṣadvīpa (*somarūpī*, 2.4.19), as Vāyu in Śālmaladvīpa (*vāyubhūtam*, 2.4.32), as Brahmā in Kuśadvīpa (*brahmarūpam*, 2.4.40), as Rudra in Krauñca-dvīpa (*rudrasvarūpaś ca*, 2.4.56) and as Sūrya in Śākadvīpa (*sūryarūpadharo*, 2.4.71). Only in the outermost *dvīpa*, Puṣkaradvīpa, does this scheme of identification appear to break down, for here it is Brahmā that is worshipped. This lack of reference to Viṣṇu is not intended to suggest that his presence does not extend as far as the outermost *dvīpa*. A closer comparison of the description of Puṣkaradvīpa with that of the other island-continents will reveal the significance of this reference to Brahmā.

The descriptions of the other *dvīpas* follow a uniform pattern. Each has a king with seven sons, so that it is divided into seven kingdoms bounded by seven mountain ranges. Each has seven rivers. In each the inhabitants are divided into four *varṇas* and live happy pious lives worshipping Viṣṇu in the form which is appropriate for them. In Puṣkaradvīpa, however, the king has two sons, so that there are no more than two kingdoms and two mountain ranges. No rivers are mentioned, presumably because there is no need for them in an island-continent surrounded by fresh water. The inhabitants of Puṣkaradvīpa are like the gods; they have neither *varṇas* nor any other social or religious institutions (2.4.83–4). There is no mention therefore of *human beings* worshipping at all. The reference to Brahmā seems to be one way of conveying the fairy tale happiness and harmony of 'this supreme earthly paradise' (*bhaumaḥ svargo 'yam uttamaḥ*, 2.4.84), where *devas* and *asuras* together honour Brahmā:

> 85a Dissociated from old age, sickness and other [ills], time yields happiness in every season … 86 There is on Puskaradvīpa a banyan tree, the supreme abode of Brahmā, where Brahmā dwells, being worshipped by gods and *asuras* (85a *sarvartu-sukhadaḥ kālo jarārogādivarjitaḥ / … //* 86 *nyagrodhaḥ puṣkara-dvīpe brahmaṇaḥ sthānam uttamam / tasmin nivasati brahmā pūjyamānaḥ surāsuraiḥ //* 2.4.85a, 86)

After the horizontal extension of the cosmos, its vertical dimensions are explored - the various *tolas* or levels which stretch below the earth and are the home of *asuras, yakṣas* and *nāgas*. Beneath all these Viṣṇu in his tāmasic form of Śesa supports the world, 'Rudra in the form of Saṃkarṣaṇa' (*saṃkarṣaṇātmako rudro, Viṣṇu* 2.5.19*/ Brahma* 21.20a).[41] Then the spheres above the world are described, the place and function of the sun and the moon, the positions of the constellations. Here again the highest place is occupied by a form of Viṣṇu:

> The mighty Lord Hari's form in the sky, made up of stars, is the shape of the porpoise, with Dhruva situated in its tail (*tārāmayaṃ bhagavataḥ śiśumārākṚti prabhoḥ / divi rūpaṃ harer yat tu tasya pucche sthito dhruvaḥ //* 2.9.1)

The movements of the sun, which is called 'Viṣṇu's supreme aspect' (*vaiṣṇavo 'ṃśaḥ paraḥ*, 2.8.56) are described in detail in 2.11–12. Again, these references to Viṣṇu's forms in the celestial regions are peculiar to the *Viṣṇu*, not part of any common purāṇic stock.

The forms of Viṣṇu which preside over cosmic time are not so systematically described as those which preside over the various aspects of space. But in the story of the Boar's raising of the earth, Matsya and Kūrma are mentioned as two other forms of Viṣṇu which have been associated with previous *kalpas* as Varāha is with this one (1.4.8).[42] According to 1.3.28 the present *kalpa* is named after the Boar, and is the first *kalpa* of the second half of Brahmā's life. The last

kalpa of the first half is called the Lotus (1.3.27).[43] It will be remembered that in *Hv* 31 there is a form of Viṣṇu with this name, which is connected with his victory over Madhu and Kaitabha (*Hv* 31.14–20).

In *Viṣṇu* 3.1.35–46 and in *Kūrma* 1.49.27–33 it is said that there is a form of Viṣṇu for the present *manvantara* and the six which preceded it, who presides over all the other leading figures of the period: Manu, his sons, the gods, the Ṛṣi*s* and the Indra who is the gods' king for that *manvantara*. The two passages are in almost complete agreement as to the names of these forms of Viṣṇu:

Manu	*Form of Viṣṇu*
Svāyambhuva	Yajña
Svarociṣa	Ajita[44]
Auttama	Satya
Tāmasa	Hari
Raivata	Māṇasa
Cākṣuṣa	Vaikuṇṣha
Vaivasvata	Vāmana

The mention of Vāmana is filled out a little in *Viṣṇu* 3.1.42–3/*Kūrma* 1.49.34–5:

> 42 Now that the Vaivasvata *manvantara* has arrived, O brahmin, Vāmana has been born from Kaśyapa and Aditi. 43 He conquered these worlds with three strides, then the mighty one gave to Indra the triple world with [all] its troubles removed (42 *manvantare 'tra samprāpte tathā vaivasvate dvija / vāmanaḥ kaśyapād viṣṇur adityāṃ sambabhūva ha //* 43 *tribhiḥ kramair imāl lokāñ jitvā yena mahātmanā / puraṃdarāya trailokyaṃ dattaṃ nihatakaṇṣakam // Viṣṇu* 3.1.42–3)

There is no mention of any form of Viṣṇu for the seven future *manvantaras*.

Although in the account of the *dvīpas* Viṣṇu is said to be worshipped throughout the cosmos in various forms, those which have been examined here can only be partly intended to make him accessible to human worship. Their chief emphasis is upon his support and direction of the cosmos. At its centre as *yajñapuruṣa*, beneath it as Śeṣa, above it as the Śiśumāra constellation, Viṣṇu informs and governs the universe. He has other forms, however, which bring him closer to human needs and aspirations, and these will now be considered.

Viṣṇu in the human world

There is a sense in which the *Viṣṇu*, like all the other *purāṇas*, knows of no such thing as a ‘human world’. Humans are simply one form of sentient being among many. Not only do they inhabit the triple world

of gods, humans and *asuras*, but alongside them live all sorts of other beings. *Gandharvas* and *apsaras*-es visit them from the celestial regions; *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas* share the earth with them; *nāgas* emerge from the watery depths to encounter them. There is, however, one region in which human values and aspirations have a special place: Bhāratavarṣa. For it is clear from the description of Bhārata in 2.3.19–26 that it differs from the other *varṣas* in the following respects: the succession of the four *yugas* takes place within it (v.19); the religious exercises of asceticism, sacrifice and giving are practised there (v.20); it is a land where merit can be acquired through works (v.22); it is through life in Bhārata that heaven or liberation can be won (w24–5):[45]

> 24 The very gods sing hymns: 'Fortunate are they in the land of Bhārata. Those who are reborn as men after being gods are on the way to heaven or the state of final liberation. 25 Consigning their deeds, with no concern for their outcome, to Viṣṇu, the Supreme Self, and having attained the land of deeds, they go sinless into dissolution in the eternal one. 26 We know not what corporeal bondage we shall receive when the deeds which won us heaven have melted away, but fortunate indeed are those men who [find themselves] in Bhārata with no defect in their faculties' (24 *gāyanti devāḥ kila gītakāni dhanyās tu te bhārate bhūmibhāge / svargāpavargāspadamārgabhūte bhavanti bhūyaḥ puruṣāḥ suratvāt //* 25 *karmāṇy asaṅkalpitatatphalāni saṃnyasya visnau paramātmabhūte / avāpya tāṃ karmamahīm anante tasmil layaṃ ye tv amalāḥ prayānti //* 26 *jānīma naitat kva vayaṃ vilīne svargaprade karmaṇi dehabandham / prāpsyāma dhanyāḥ khalu te manuṣyā ye bhārate nendriyaviprahīnāḥ //* 2.3.24–6)

Within this 'real world' (as opposed to the *bhogabhūmaya*ḥ of the other *varṣas*) Viṣṇu displays further forms. He has a form for each *yuga*:

> 54 Hear, Maitreya, how Viṣṇu, who is characterised by the function of maintenance, establishes the ages in each four-*yuga* period. 55 In the *kṚtayuga* the Self of all beings, in the form of Kapila and others, bestows supreme wisdom, intent upon the welfare of all beings. 56 Then in the *tretāyuga*, in the form of a world conqueror, the Lord punishes the wicked and protects the triple world. 57 In the form of Vedavyāsa, the all-pervading one divides the one Veda into four, with hundreds of branches, and makes it more extensive. 58 Having separated the Vedas in the *dvāparayuga*, at the end of the *kaliyuga* the Lord Hari again, in the form of Kalki, establishes evildoers in the [right] way. (54 *caturyuge 'py asau viṣṇuḥ sthitivyāpāralakṣaṇaḥ / yugavyavas-thāṃ kurute yathā maitreya tac chṚṇu //* 55 *kṚte yuge paraṃ jñānaṃ kapilādisvarūpadhṚk / dadāti sarvabhūtātmā sarvabhūta-hite rataḥ //* 56 *cakravartisvarūpeṇa tretāyām api sa prabhuḥ / duṣṣānāṃ nigrahaṃ kurvan paripāti jagat trayam //* 57 *vedam ekaṃ caturbhedaṃ kṚtvā śākhāśatair vibhuḥ / karoti bahulaṃ bhūyo vedavyāsasvarūpadhṚk //* 58 *vedāṃs tu dvāpare vyasya kaler ante punar hariḥ / kalkisvarūpī durvṚttān mārge sthāpayati prabhuḥ //* 3.2.54–8)

These *yuga* appearances of Viṣṇu are found in no other *purāṇa* but the *Viṣṇu*, although Kapila, Vyāsa and Kalki have already been encountered as forms of Viṣṇu in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*.

However, Viṣṇu is not represented within the time span of the *yugas* simply by these four figures. Within the history of Bhārata various individuals are said to be examples of Viṣṇu's intervention into human affairs: they are mentioned in the genealogies of Book 4 as 'aspects'

(*aṃśa*) of Viṣṇu. Although they seem here to be a special group of Viṣṇu's forms, *aṃśa* is not applied exclusively to Viṣṇu's activity through historical individuals,[46] but is used also in 1.6.14 for his role as time, in 1.22.24–8 for his roles as creator, preserver and destroyer, and for the sun in 2.8.56. PṚthu is also described as *viṣṇor aṃśa* in 1.13.45; he is not a historical figure, but the archetypal *cakravartin* (world ruler) who brings civilisation to the world. Again, although other *purāṇas* give some prominence to PṚthu, it is only the *Viṣṇu* which says that he is recognised by Brahmā as 'an aspect of Viṣṇu' because of the discus marked on his right hand, and it is probably PṚthu who is understood as Viṣṇu's appearance *cakravar-tisvarūpeṇa* for the *tretāyuga* (3.2.56).

The first of these 'historical' *aṃśas* to be encountered in Book 4 is Kṛṣṇa's brother **Baladeva**. In 4.1.65–96, he is presented without any mention of Kṛṣṇa (unless *keśavāṃśo* in 4.1.91 refers to him).[47] In vv90-l Brahmā is speaking to Raivata/Kakudmin who has come to him from his city of Kuśasthalī in search of a worthy husband for his daughter Revatī. He explains that while they have been listening to the singing of heavenly choirs many ages have gone by, so that all the suitors whom Raivata might once have considered have long since died. However, this is no loss because now:

> 90 He in whom the universe exists, who is this universe, the primordial self-created one who dwells within this universe, Viṣṇu the source of all beings, has manifested an aspect of himself by descending upon the earth, O king. 91 Your pleasant city of Kuśasthalī, O king, was eminent of old like Amarāvatī. Now it is Dvārakā, and there lives the aspect of Keśava [i.e. Viṣṇu] named Baladeva (90 *yasmiñ jagad yo jagad etad ādyo yaś cāśrito 'smiñ jagati svayambhūḥ / sa sarvabhūtaprabhavo dharitryāṃ svāṃśena viṣṇur nṚpate 'vatīrṇaḥ* // 91 *kuśasthalī yā tava bhūpa ramyā purī purābhad amarāvatīva / sā dvārakā samprati tatra cāste sa keśavāṃśo baladevanāmā* // 4.1.90–91)[48]

This marriage story is found also in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.61.19b-25/ *Vāyu* 86.24–30, without Baladeva being identified with Viṣṇu.

The next is **Purañjaya**, who is described in almost exactly the same terms as those used of Baladeva in the previous chapter, i.e. as … *aṃśena* … *avatīrya* (4.2.26). Viṣṇu himself uses these words when he announces to the gods that he will descend as Purañjaya in order to defeat the *asuras*. He accomplishes this defeat mounted upon Indra in the form of a bull,[49] and thus wins the name of Kakutstha. Purañjaya is mentioned also in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.74.14–15/ *Vāyu* 99.14 / *Matsya* 48.12, but he is not identified with Viṣṇu.

The third *aṃśa* to be mentioned is **Kapila**, who has already been said in 3.2.55 to be the form of Viṣṇu for the *kṚtayuga*. In 4.4.12 he is said to 'consist of an aspect of the Lord Puruṣottama' (*bhagavataḥ puruṣottamasyāṃśabhūtam*). He has also already been mentioned in

2.14.9 as ‘an aspect come to earth of the Lord Viṣṇu who is all beings in order to destroy the delusions of the universe’ (… *bhagavataḥ sarvabhūtasya … / viṣṇor aṃśo jaganmohanāśāyorvīm upāgataḥ*). As with Purañjaya, the reference to Kapila occurs in a condensed form of the well-known scenario of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa responding in human form to an appeal for help from the gods, but here a different twist is given to the theme, in that the gods appeal, not to Nārāyaṇa himself but to his *aṃśa* Kapila for help against Sagara's sixty thousand sons. Kapila assures them that these sons will soon be destroyed — and in fact blasts them with his fiery glance when they accuse him of stealing their father's sacrificial horse (4.4.22). Unlike Baladeva and Purañjaya, Kapila is identified elsewhere with Viṣṇu, not only in the *Mahābhārata*[50] but also in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.63.145/*Vāyu* 88.147c and *Matsya* 12.43.

In 4.4.87–103 the story of **Rāma Dāśarathi** is told. He has already been mentioned as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (together with Vāmana, Paraśurāma and Kṛṣṇa) in 1.9.142–5. Here he and his three brothers are said to be an aspect of the lotus-navelled god, divided into four (4.4.87). At the end of the story, Rāma and his brothers are all described as ‘aspects of the Lord’ (*bhagavadaṃśeṣu*, 4.4.103). Again, this identification is found elsewhere — not only, as was seen in Chapter 2, in the *prādurbhāva* lists of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* and the *Harivaṃśa*, but in other *purāṇas* also; *Matsya* 12.50 describes Rāma and his brothers as ‘all one with Nārāyaṇa’ (*nārāyaṇātmakāḥ sarve*) and *Kūrma* 1.20.18 says that ‘Viṣṇu the maker of the universe was born with a part [of himself] in order to destroy Rāvana’ (*jajñe rāvaṇanāśārthaṃ viṣṇur aṃśena viśvakṚt*).

Rāma Jāmadagnya appears twice in *Viṣṇu* 4. In 4.7.17–36 the story of his birth is told, and he is described in v.36 as ‘an aspect of Lord Nārāyaṇa, the whole world's teacher’ (… *bhagavatas sakalaloka-guror nārāyaṇasyāṃśam* …). In 4.11.11–20 his name appears again in the story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, who is said to have been killed ‘by Paraśurāma, an aspect of Lord Nārāyaṇa’ (… *bhagavannārāyaṇāṃśena paraśurāmeṇa* …, v.20). This identification occurs in *Kūrma* 1.21.18, but not in any of the *Brahmāṇḍa*/ *Vāyu* or *Matsya* passages which mention Rāma Jāmadagnya,[51] although, like Rāma Dāśarathi, he features in the *prādurbhāva* lists of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* and the *Harivaṃśa*.

4.11.1–2 contains the first reference to **Kṛṣṇa** in the *Viṣṇu*'s account of the lunar dynasty. Parāśara announces that he will tell Maitreya about the family of Yayāti's eldest son Yadu in which ‘Lord Viṣṇu, without beginning or end, manifested himself by descending with an aspect’ (… *aṃśena bhagāvān anādinidhano viṣṇur avatatāra*, V.2). Even

if there were no Book 5 in the *Viṣṇu* the hearer/reader would know a considerable amount about Kṛṣṇa: his involvement with the fortunes of the Syamantaka jewel (4.13.12–162);[52] his parentage and the extraordinary circumstances of his birth (4.15.18–50); the enemy destroyed by him in three life-times as Hiraṇyakaśipu, Rāvaṇa and Śiśupāla (4.14.44–15.17); his restoration of Parīkṣit to life (4.20.52–3). He would also realise that this 'aspect of Viṣṇu' was far more important than any other. The language which is used of Kṛṣṇa here goes beyond anything which is said about any other *aṃśa* of Viṣṇu. His descent to earth is mentioned time and again (*avataraṇam ācacakṣe*, 4.13.53; *avatatāra*, 4.11.2; 4.15.30; *avatīrṇa*, 4.11.4; 4.15.34; *avatīrnāṃsasya*, 4.14.51; *aṃśāvatāra*, 4.14.28). His purpose in coming to earth is described as *bhārāvataraṇa* (4.13.20,53) or *bhārāvatāraṇa* (4.14.51).[53] He is even identified in 4.11.4 with 'the supreme *brahman* which has no form' (*paraṃ brahman nirākṚti*), and is presented as being born into a race of gods (4.15.46–9). The *prādurbhāva* lists of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* and the *Harivaṃśa* are much more restrained than this in their language about Kṛṣṇa.

The other *aṃśa* of 4.11 is **Dattātreya**, mentioned briefly as Arjuna Kārtavīrya's benefactor, and described in 4.11.12 as 'an aspect of the Lord' (… *bhagavadaṃśa* …). He appears in the *prādurbhāva* lists of *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.73.72–105a/ *Vāyu* 98.71–104 and *Matsya* 47.237–48, but nowhere else in any of these *purāṇas* is he identified with Viṣṇu. In *Mārkaṇḍdeya* 19.32–6, however, Dattātreya is praised as a manifestation of Viṣṇu.

The last *aṃśa* to be named in Book 4 is **Kalki**, already mentioned as the form of Viṣṇu for the *kaliyuga* (3.2.58).[54] He is mentioned again in 4.24.98:

> When *dharma*, both revealed and handed down, has come to utter ruin and the Kali age has almost expired, an *aṃśa* of the Lord Vāsudeva, the creator of the universe, the preceptor of all things moving and motionless, without beginning, middle or end, identical with *brahman*, yet in his own form, shall descend here in this world in the form of Kalki, endowed with the eight supernatural powers,[55] in the home of Viṣṇuyaśas, an eminent brahmin of Śambala village. In the majesty of his unlimited energy he will destroy all foreigners, robbers and those whose minds are set on doing evil, and he will reinstate everything in its own *dharma (śraute smārte ca dharme viplavam atyantam upagate kṣīṇaprāye ca kalāv aśeṣajagat sraṣṣuś carācaraguror ādimadhyāntarahitasya brahmamayasyātmarūpiṇo bhagavato vāsu-devasyāṃśaś śambalagrāma pradhānabrāhmaṇasya viṣṇuyaśaso gṚhe ṣṣaguṇarddhisamanvitaḥ kalkirūpī jagaty atrāvatīrya sakala-mlecchadasyuduṣṣācaraṇacetasām aśeṣāṇām apariccchinnaśakti-māhātmyaḥ kṣayaṃ kariṣyati svadharmeṣu cākhilam eva saṃsthā-payiṣyati //*)[56]

When Parāśara sums up what he has taught Maitreya in Book 4 he says:

> I have now related to you in order the lineage of Manu, in which kings each perform their tiny share of Viṣṇu's work of maintenance (*ity eṣa kathitaḥ samyaṅ manor vaṃśo*

mayā tava / yatra sthitipravṚttasya viṣṇor aṃśāmsakā nṚpāḥ // 4.24.138)

Perhaps here the composers of the *Viṣṇu* were putting the Guptas in their place, reminding them that all rulers are dependent for their power upon Viṣṇu. Certainly in the *ślokas* immediately before this, which are said to be sung by Earth (v.127), the ambitions of kings are mocked because they all end in death (vv128–36). Even the mighty Guptas cannot claim any real power of their own, but simply 'perform their tiny share' of Viṣṇu's work.

The closing verses of 4.24 do more than summarise Book 4. They connect up also with the end of Book 1, where the kings who are Viṣṇu's *aṃśas* are described in these terms:

> 16 All these kings and others made powerful by Viṣṇu the Supreme Spirit, whose work is the maintenance [of the universe], most excellent sage, 17 all lords of beings who shall exist, or who have existed, brahmin, are all aspects of Viṣṇu who is all beings, O best of brahmins … 20bc those who have passed away, those who are living now and others who shall be are all produced from aspects of Viṣṇu who is all beings (16 *ete sarve pravṚttasya sthitau viṣṇor mahātmanaḥ / vibhūtibhūtā rājāno ye cānye munisattama //* 17 *ye bhaviṣyanti ye bhūtāḥ sarve bhūteśvarā dvija / te sarve sarvabhūtasya viṣṇor aṃśā dvijottama //* … 20bc *atītā vartamānāś ca ye bhaviṣyanti cāpare / te sarve sarvabhūtasya viṣṇor aṃśasamudbhavāḥ //* 1.22.16–17,20bc)

By its insistence upon the presence of Viṣṇu within every aspect of the universe, the *Viṣṇu* appears to have satisfied the human need for contact with the divine. God is not only beyond us and deep within us, not only upholding and informing the universe, but he also assumes a variety of roles upon the human stage, so that men and women may relate to him at a level where he is truly accessible. But what emotional satisfaction would be derived from relating to God as Vyāsa or as Rāma Jāmadagnya? It was perhaps an awareness of this need for emotional satisfaction which led to the inclusion of the *Kṛṣṇacarita* within the *Viṣṇu*. An examination of Book 5, however, and the *avatāra* ideas associated with it, requires a new chapter.

Chapter Five

Kṛṣṇa in the *Viṣṇupurāna*

So far there has been little to suggest that the *avatāra* idea has much significance for the composers of the *Viṣṇu*. Throughout most of the *purāṇa* the accessibility of the Supreme God is expressed either in terms of his manifesting himself directly to his worshippers in his own distinctive form or in his establishing a wide range of forms within the cosmos which reveal his presence to some extent or another. In either case the word *rūpa* is much more frequently used than any part of the verb *ava*to denote the forms in which Viṣṇu manifests himself in the cosmos generally, and *aṃśa* is the preferred word for his manifestations in the world of human beings. The *Viṣṇu* does have a place for the *avatāra* idea, however, and for God's dramatic intervention in his own world in the form of Kṛṣṇa.

RŪPA AND *AVATĀRA*

Among the many forms of Viṣṇu which have been mentioned, all the figures which are found in the standard *daśāvatāra* list have appeared at some point or another, as well as many of those which are found in other lists. Yet the *Viṣṇu* lacks anything which could be called a deliberately presented *avatāra* list which is intended to give information about the sequence of Viṣṇu's manifestations. The nearest approaches to an *avatāra* list occur at 1.4.8, 1.9.142–5, 5.5.15–17 and 5.17.10. If 1.4.8 is to be regarded as a list it has only two members, Matsya and Kūrma — or possibly three if Varāha itself is added.[1] But the general tone of *Viṣṇu* 1.4, which tells the story of Earth's rescue from the cosmic waters by the great Boar, suggests that these three are being presented as cosmogonic *kalpa* figures rather than as *avatār as* in the full sense, intervening in the world in order to restore *dharma*.[2]

Again, 1.9.142–5 is really a list of Śrī's manifestations as Viṣṇu's

eternal companion:

> 142 Thus when the God of gods Janārdana, the master of the universe, makes his descent, then Śrī is his companion, 143 So she was born from a lotus when Hari was Aditi's son; when he was Rāma Bhārgava then she was this Earth; 144 she was Sītā when he was Rāghava, Rukmiṇī in his birth as Kṛṣṇa, and in Viṣṇu's other descents she is constantly with him. 145 With a divine form when he is divine and a human one when he is human, she assumes a body for herself in keeping with that of Viṣṇu (142 *evaṃ yadā jagatsvāmī devadevo janārdanaḥ / avatāraṃ karoty eṣā tadā śrīs tatsahāyinī //* 143 *punaś ca padmād utpannā ādityo 'bhūd yadā hariḥ / yadā tu bhārgavo rāmas tadābhūd dharaṇī tv iyam //* 144 *rāghavatve 'bhavat sītā rukmiṇī kṛṣṇajanmani / anyeṣu cāvatāreṣu viṣṇor eṣānapāyinī //* 145 *devatve devadeheyaṃ manuṣyatve ca mānuṣī / viṣṇor dehānurūpāṃ vai karoty eṣātmanas tanum //*)

The list of Viṣṇu's *avatār as* here consists of four names from the central section of the *daśāvatāra* series: Vāmana (Āditya), Paraśurāma (Bhārgava Rāma), Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Whether or not this shows an acquaintance with the series as a whole is impossible to tell, but the emphasis is certainly on Viṣṇu's consort rather than on Viṣṇu himself.

5.5.15–17 is part of the protective formula (5.5.14–21) which, with unconscious irony, Nanda says over the sleeping baby who, by killing Pūtanā, has just given the first proof of his superhuman ability to protect himself against all his enemies. More ironically still, these verses invoke other forms of Viṣṇu, the three forms which are so often found together: Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana. Most of the names which are invoked in 5.5.14–21, however, are not those of *avatāras*, so it is highly unlikely that this was intended as an *avatāra* list.

Perhaps the nearest approach to a true *avatāra* list in the *Viṣṇu* is 5.17.10:

> Today he will speak with me, that unborn one who has maintained the world in forms such as those of fish, tortoise, boar, horse and lion (*matsyakūrmavarāhāśvasiṃharūpādibhiḥ sthitim / cakāra jagato yo 'jaḥ so 'dya māṃ pralapiṣyati //*)

This verse is part of Akrūra's thoughts as he goes from Mathurā to VṚndāvana to meet Kṛṣṇa for the first time. It enumerates earlier appearances of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa and states that all these have a common purpose, the maintenance of the world.[3]

There are four verses in the *Viṣṇu*, two in Book 1 and two in Book 5, which seem to sum up the part which the *avatāras* play for this *purāṇa*. First of all, when PṚthivī sees the Boar diving into the cosmic ocean to rescue her, she hails him in words which show that she sees beyond his animal form: he is not only 'the lotus-eyed holder of the conch, the discus and the mace' (… *puṇḍarīkākṣa śaṇkhacakragadādhara*, 1.4.12) but also 'the Self of the Supreme Self, the Self of the Supreme Person' (… *paramātmātman puruṣātman* …, 1.4.14). In her awareness of her rescuer's true nature she declares:

What your highest essence is, no one knows. What the gods worship is the form [manifested] in your descents (*bhavato yat paraṃ tattvaṃ tan na jānāti kaś cana / avatāreṣu yad rūpaṃ tad arcanti divaukasaḥ* // 1.4.17)

The other verse from Book 1 occurs in the Prahlāda episode. Prahlāda's father, the Daitya king Hiraṇyakaśipu, is so angered by his son's continued assertions that Viṣṇu alone is the supreme power in the universe, that he makes several attempts to kill him. These are useless, because Prahlāda's attachment to Viṣṇu makes him invulnerable. Eventually Hiraṇyakaśipu orders his servants to throw his son into the ocean and weigh him down with rocks so that he cannot possibly escape. In this situation Prahlāda fixes his mind firmly upon Viṣṇu and praises him every day. Although the *Viṣṇu* does not give any description of the physical aspect of Prahlāda's worship, the repetitions suggest an ecstatic state:

79 Glory to him, glory to him, glory to him, the Great Self, to him who has neither name nor form, who is the only true existent, 80 whose descent-forms the gods worship, not seeing his highest form, glory to him, the Great Self (79 *namas tasmai namas tasmai namas tasmai mahātmane / nāmarūpaṃ na yasyaiko yo 'stitvenopalabhyate* // 80 *yasyāvatārarūpāṇi samarcanti divaukasaḥ / apaśyantaḥ paraṃ rūpaṃ namas tasmai mahātmane* // 1.19.79–80)

The parallel verses in Book 5 occur in the two episodes from Kṛṣṇa's boyhood which the *Viṣṇu*, like the *Harivaṃśa*, presents as companion pieces. One is Kṛṣṇa's taming of the *nāga* Kāliya (5.7) and the other is Rāma's killing of the *asura* Pralamba (5.9). In 5.7.61–76 Kāliya, defeated by Kṛṣṇa, praises him and begs him to spare his life. In a series of *ślokas* which all end with the refrain 'How can I praise him?' (*so 'rcyate vā kathaṃ mayā*, 5.7.66–9), the serpent king doubts his worthiness to praise Kṛṣṇa. One of these *ślokas* is:

He whose descent-forms the king of the gods always worships, [because] he does not know his highest form — how can I praise him? (*yasyāvatārarūpāṇi devarājas sadārcati I na vetti paramaṃ rūpaṃ so 'rcyate vā kathaṃ mayā* // 5.7.67)

The verse in 5.9 differs from the others in one very important aspect. They are all spoken by someone dependent upon Viṣṇu, whether for rescue in the case of PṚthivī and Prahlāda, or for forgiveness in the case of Kāliya. 5.9.28, however, could almost be seen as Viṣṇu speaking to himself, since it is Kṛṣṇa addressing his brother Rāma and reminding him of his true identity at the point when he appears to be stricken by fear of Pralamba:

Indeed no other knows your celestial form. What is worshipped by all the gods is your descent-form … (*divyaṃ hi rūpam tava vetti nānyo devair aśeṣair avatārarūpam / tad arcyate* …)

It will be seen that these four verses show a marked similarity, both in thought and in language.[4] The similarity of language is obvious in

all four: the use of *avatāra* to qualify *rūpa*, the contrast between *avatārarūpa* (or *avatāreṣu yad rūpam* in 1.4.17), and *paraṃ/divyaṃ rūpam/tattvam*, the use of √Ṛc or one of its compounds in each case — it is hard to believe that all this is just a matter of pure coincidence.[5] The similarity of thought is obvious also: that the true form of the Supreme Being is unknown even to the gods, who must be content with worshipping the *avatāra* forms in which he chooses to make himself known within the triple world of gods, men and *asuras*. Yet at the same time the speaker is implicitly claiming to be someone whose knowledge extends beyond the *avatāra* level to the highest form of the Supreme. Although the *avatāra* reveals God, the true *bhakta* should seek to go beyond this 'descent-form' to see God's 'highest form'.[6]

Yet Kṛṣṇa is presented as an *avatārarūpa* of Viṣṇu. Are these verses intended to imply that he is of no ultimate significance for the *bhakta*? If the suggestion put forward at the end of the last chapter is a sound one, that the *Kṛṣṇacarita* was introduced into the *Viṣṇu* in order to provide a satisfying focus for *bhakti*, this can hardly be the case. At the same time, the stories of Dhruva and Prahlāda show that the *bhakta* can also turn to Viṣṇu in his celestial form. It was important to the composers of the *Viṣṇu* to make clear that it is this same divine reality which shines through the human figure of Kṛṣṇa, and that no *avatāra* can be thought to rival Viṣṇu as Supreme God.

THE PARADOX OF THE *VIṢṆUPURĀṆA'S KṚṢṆACARITA*

Kṛṣṇa's story as seen by the *Viṣṇu* appears to be both important and yet redundant. It disturbs the continuity between Books 4 and 6. It is at odds with the *Viṣṇu*'s idea that the Supreme God's *avatāra* forms are of little significance for the worshipper. Yet it is the longest book in the *purāṇa*, and the very fact that it was inserted into an already complete and coherent text shows that the composers of the *Viṣṇu* must have had a high regard for it.

This paradoxical situation is matched by the way in which Kṛṣṇa himself is presented. On the one hand, he is identical with Viṣṇu, and thus with *brahman*. This is most apparent in the language which is addressed to Kṛṣṇa in the prayers and praises which occur more often in Book 5 than anywhere else in the *Viṣṇu* except Book 1. The same negative predication and paradoxical language which has been noted in connection with Viṣṇu is used here of Kṛṣṇa also, and the identity between the two is reinforced by the fact that throughout the *Viṣṇu* as a whole, the name Kṛṣṇa (together with Govinda and Keśava which

are given to Kṛṣṇa in 5.12.12 and 5.16.23) is frequently used for the Supreme God. This is particularly true of Book 1 (e.g. Kṛṣṇa, 1.15.154; Keśava, 1.4.31, 1.9.90; Govinda, 1.8.26, 1.12.51).

On the other hand, the introductory verses of Book 5 present Kṛṣṇa as no more than Viṣṇu's *aṃśāṃśa*: a 'tiny share' or 'an insignificant aspect'. This word is used of him by Maitreya in his request for further information (5.1.3) and echoed by Parāśara in his reply (5.1.4), and it appears to be a considered choice on the part of the *purāṇa*'s composers. Although the *Viṣṇu*'s *Kṛṣṇacarita* is very like the *Brahma*'s, each *purāṇa* has its own introduction, their first verse in common being *Viṣṇu* 5.1.1*2*/*Brahma* 181.5. The *Brahma*'s introductory verses, which are given on page 162, do not contain *aṃśāṃśa*. The change of perspective which this word announces is the *Viṣṇu*'s alone. From surveying the whole of space it is about to settle upon one small area within Bhārata. From ranging over vast cycles of time, which are as nothing to the God who is time itself, it is about to focus upon one human life span, at the end of the *dvāparayuga*. Parāśara's reply to Maitreya shows that this life span is important for the whole cosmos, because it is 'the story of the birth of a tiny share of Viṣṇu for the good of the universe' (*viṣṇor aṃśāṃśasambhūticaritaṃ jagato hitam*, 5.1.4). Moreover, it has already been described in 4.11.4 as the story of one who can be identified with the supreme *brahman*. Nevertheless, the two verses in Book 5 which point to the contrast between the highest form and the *avatāra* forms (5.7.67; 5.9.28) remind the hearer/reader of Kṛṣṇa's insignificance by comparison with Viṣṇu.

The descent of the gods and the birth of Kṛṣṇa

This change of perspective can be seen in the *Viṣṇu*'s approach to the story of the descent of the gods. The *Harivaṃśa* presents it as a development in Viṣṇu's own story: the celestial champion of the gods awakes from his yogic sleep to a new challenge which necessitates his presence as a human hero in the *trailokya*. The *Viṣṇu* begins the story with a human scene, the marriage of Vasudeva and Devakī (5.1.5). While the latter's kinsman Kaṃsa is doing them the honour of driving their wedding chariot he hears a voice from the sky upbraiding him for his folly in thus honouring a woman whose eighth child will bring about his death (5.1.6–8). He draws his sword to kill Devakī, but refrains from doing so when Vasudeva promises to hand over all her children to him at birth (5.1.9–11).

Only then, in 5.1.12–65, is the account of Earth's complaint to the gods unfolded. This is clearly the same story in essence as that told in *Hv* 41–5 and *Mbh* 1.54–61. Earth is overrun by Daityas, led by

Kālanemi who has become Kaṃsa (5.1.21–7). She presents her case to Brahmā, who tells the rest of the gods that they must approach Nārāyaṇa,[7] because:

> Entirely for the sake of the universe he who is the spirit of all and consists of the universe manifests an aspect of his being by descending upon the earth and maintains *dharma* (*sarvathaiva jagaty arthe sa sarvātmā jaganmayaḥ / sattvāṃśenāvatīryorvyāṃ dharmasya kurute sthitim* // 5.1.32)

Therefore Brahmā and the gods make their way to the northern shore of the Ocean of Milk, where Brahmā praises Hari Nārāyaṇa, and tells him that all the gods are ready to do his bidding. 'The supreme Lord' (*bhagavān parameśvaraḥ*, 5.1.59) plucks off two hairs from his head:[8]

> He said to the gods: 'When these two hairs of mine have descended to earth they will remove the affliction of the earth's load' (*uvāca sa surān etau matkeśau vasudhātale / avatīrya bhuvo bhārakleśahāniṃ kariṣyataḥ* // 5.1.60)

The other gods descend, as they do in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*. Viṣṇu himself, however, is presented as being far beyond the *devas*, so that even something as small as one of his hairs will have the power to kill Kaṃsa (5.1.63–4). In 5.1.65 the gods are said to descend from Mt Meru to the earth, but there is no description here of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa himself descending. The presence of his hairs on earth will be sufficient.

Both the word *aṃśāṃśa* and the story of the two hairs thus distance Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa from each other. They suggest that the human figure who is the central character of Book 5 possesses but a tiny portion of the might of that Viṣṇu whom the rest of the *purāṇa* proclaims as one with, yet infinitely greater than, the whole cosmos. This suggestion is strengthened by Viṣṇu's remoteness from the other gods in *Viṣṇu* 5.1.[9] Nevertheless, once the change of perspective in Book 5 has been made this *aṃśāṃśa* becomes all-important. His identity with Viṣṇu and with *brahman* is affirmed, and the *Harivaṃśa*'s alternation between concealment and revelation is replaced by a stronger emphasis upon revelation.

As in *Hv* 46, Viṣṇu is seen in 5.1 stage-managing his own appearance in the world as Kṛṣṇa, together with Yoganidrā (5.1.70). Even before his birth, his radiance suffuses Devakī, so that the gods hymn her as Prakrti, Vāc, Aditi and Diti. She too has made a divine descent upon the earth, as the gods proclaim:

> You are Svāhā, you are Svadhā,[10] you are knowledge, nectar, the light in the sky. You have descended to earth in order to preserve the whole world (*tvaṃ svāhā tvaṃ svadhā vidyā sudhā tvaṃ jyotir ambare / tvaṃ sarvalokarakṣārtham avatīrṇā mahītale* // 5.2.20)

Kṛṣṇa is born 'with four arms … and with the *śrīvatsa* upon his chest'

(*caturbāhum … śrīvatsavakṣasam*, 5.3.8). For fear of Kaṃsa, Vasudeva and Devakī implore him to put aside this divine form (vv10–11,12–13), and he does so, appearing as an ordinary baby whom Vasudeva then exchanges with Yaśodā's newborn daughter, who is of course Yoganidrā (5.2.3). After being killed by Kaṃsa she is transformed into a goddess (5.3.25–9) and disappears from the text. There is no equivalent passage to that in the *Harivaṃśa* where she is reverenced as Ekānaṃśā, along with her brothers Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, by the assembled Yādavas. Even in this early passage her link with Kṛṣṇa is less strongly emphasised than it is in the *Harivaṃśa*. She is not, as there, *viṣṇuśarīrajā* (*Hv* 40.31; cf. 48.10).

Kṛṣṇa among the cowherds

In narrating Kṛṣṇa's three earliest childhood exploits, the *Viṣṇu* does not lay the same emphasis as the *Harivaṃśa* upon the ignorance and fear of the cowherds. The word *mānuṣabuddhi* does not occur in the *Viṣṇu*'s description of their reactions to Kṛṣṇa's early exploits, and *āścarya* occurs only in 5.19.5–7, where it was presumably so deeply embedded in the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Akrūra, after the latter's vision in the Yamunā, that it was almost certain to be retained in any adaptation of the basic story. Rather than stressing the herder community's ignorance and fear, the *Viṣṇu* lays emphasis upon the rustic piety of Nanda and Yaśodā. After the death of Pūtanā, Yaśodā waves a cow's tail over the infant Kṛṣṇa (5.5.12), and Nanda puts cow dung on the baby's head and gives him a protective bracelet (5.5.13), accompanying the latter action with a protective formula using fifteen names of Viṣṇu (5.5.14–21). After the episode of the cart Yaśodā praises the upturned cart and the pieces of pots and bowls which have been broken in the upheaval (5.6.7).

The *Viṣṇu*'s great emphasis upon revelation is seen clearly in its treatment of the Kāliya episode. To begin with, Kṛṣṇa's awareness of his own identity at this point is brought out in more theological terms than in the *Harivaṃśa*. In the latter he says, on first seeing Kāliya's pool:

> For this reason I am living in this settlement and have been born as a cowherd: for the punishment of those evildoers who are set upon the wrong road (*etadarthaṃ ca vāso 'yaṃ vraje 'smin gopajanma ca / amiṣām utpathasthānāṃ śāsanārthaṃ durātmanām // Hv* 55.56)

However, in *Viṣṇu* 5.7.9 he says:

> For this reason I have made my descent into this world: so that those evildoers who are on the wrong road may be pacified (*etadarthaṃ tu lohe 'sminn avatāraḥ kṚto mayā / yad eṣām utpathasthānāṃ kāryā śāntir durātmanām //*)

Kṛṣṇa's description of himself as having made his descent, and the introduction of the word *śānti*, which suggests both ultimate bliss and destruction, thus add theological weight to the statement made in the *Harivaṃśa*.[11]

Moreover, as the episode develops it becomes more and more revelatory of Kṛṣṇa's true identity. Rāma/Saṃkarṣaṇa exhorts him at much greater length than in *Hv* 56.27–8. In 5.7.35–42 he addresses him as 'supreme God of gods' (*devadeveśa*, v.35), and says that he is 'the still point of the universe, as the hub is of the spokes [of a wheel]' (*jagato nābhir arāṇām iva saṃśrayaḥ*, v.36).[12] Kāliya's wives also praise Kṛṣṇa as they plead for their husband (5.7.48–59). They begin by declaring:

> You have been recognised, supreme God of gods, you are the omniscient, unsurpassed one, an aspect of that which is the supreme inconceivable light, the supreme lord (*jñāto 'si devadeveśa sarvajñas tvam anuttamaḥ / paraṃ jyotir acintyaṃ yad tadaṃśaḥ parameśvaraḥ* // 5.7.48)

For Kāliya himself, begging his conqueror to spare his life (5.7.61–76), Kṛṣṇa is even 'more supreme than the supreme' (*parasmāt paramo*, v.62). The universe is but a minute portion of him (v.64) and he has the form of both being and non-being (v.65).

Whereas the *Viṣṇu* thus makes several significant additions to the Kāliya story, it retells the Govardhana episode very much in the same manner as the *Harivaṃśa*, except that it is more concise. It condenses the *Harivaṃśa*'s vivid description of Indra's storm into fewer verses and omits some striking touches, e.g. the reference in *Hv* 61.30a to Kṛṣṇa's holding up the mountain with his left hand. Indra's granting of the two autumn months to Kṛṣṇa (*Hv* 62.45) is also omitted from the *Viṣṇu* veṚṣion of the story, and there is no mention of the *Mahābhārata* war. When Indra speaks of Arjuna it is in terms which suggest that he will help Kṛṣṇa, rather than being helped by him (5.12.16–17).[13]

The *Viṣṇu* gives a much more important role to the *gopīs* and to Kṛṣṇa's relationship with them. What was presented in the *Harivaṃśa* as a brief postlude to Kṛṣṇa's triumph over Indra is now not only told at greater length in 5.13.14–62 than in *Hv* 63.15–35, but is also given a spiritual component which the *Harivaṃśa* lacked. This is made plain from the first mention of the girls' coming to Kṛṣṇa:

> 20 And one girl stayed inside her house, seeing an older member of her family outside, and meditated upon Govinda, absorbed in him with closed eyes. 21 From the pure joy of being conscious of him her stored merits were wiped out, and from the great sorrow of not meeting with him all her sins were dissolved.[14] 22 Another cowherd girl attained liberation by reflecting with bated breath upon the world's origin, the embodiment of the supreme *brahman* (20 *kā cic cāvasathasyānte sthitvā dṚṣṣvā bahir gurum / tanmayatvena govindaṃ dadhyau mūitalocanā* // 21 *taccittavimalāhlādakṣīnapuṇyacayā tathā /*

tadaprāptimahāduḥkhavilīnāśeṣapātakā // 22 *cintayantī jagatsūtiṃ parabrahmasvarūpiṇam / nirucchvāsatayā muktiṃ gatānyā gopakanyakā* // 5.13.20–2)

At the end of the episode also the same note is struck:

> 60 And so Madhusūdana, the immeasurable Self that destroys evil, paid honour in the time of his youth and enjoyed himself in [those] nights with them [i.e. the *gopīs*]. 61 And as the Lord, in his own essential form he pervades their husbands and them and all beings, abiding [in them] like the wind. 62 Just as in all beings are space, fire, earth, water, wind and the Self, so everything is pervaded by him and he dwells in everything (60 *so 'pi kaiśorakavayo mānayan madhusūdanaḥ reme tābhir ameyātmā kṣapāsu kṣapitāhitaḥ* // 61 *tadbhartṚṣu tathā tāsu sarvabhūteṣu ceśvaraḥ / ātmasvarūparūpo 'sau vyāpī vāyur iva sthitaḥ* // 62 *yathā samastabhūteṣu nabho 'gniḥ pṚthivī jalam / vāyuś cātmā tathaivāsau vyāpya sarvam avasthitaḥ* // 5.13.60–2)[15]

The final episode in Kṛṣṇa's time among the cowherds, Akrūra's visit to bring him and Rāma back to Mathurā, is the next which has particular significance for the *Viṣṇu*. Whereas the *Harivaṃśa* sets the scene for Akrūra's arrival by describing Nanda's encampment as a visitor arriving at twilight would see it (*Hv* 68.1–13), the *Viṣṇu* describes only what is going on in Akrūra's mind: a joyful anticipation of the moment when 'I shall see Viṣṇu's face' (*viṣṇor drakṣyāmy ahaṃ mukham*, 5.17.3,4; cf. vv2,5). This leads into an anticipatory eulogy of the 'one who is called Yajñapuruṣa by those who sacrifice, Vāsudeva by the Sātvatas and Viṣṇu by those who have full knowledge of the Veda' (*yajvabhir yajñapuruṣo vāsudevaś ca sātvataiḥ / vedāntavedibhir viṣṇuḥ procyate* …, 5.17.15).

In the *Harivaṃśa* Akrūra gives Kṛṣṇa a touching description of the sorrows of his parents (69.5–25), but in the *Viṣṇu* this is reduced to two verses (5.18.5–6), giving space for the *gopīs'* lament at parting from Kṛṣṇa (5.18.13–31). Akrūra's vision in the Yamunā, however, is related as fully as in the *Harivaṃśa*, and Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is given a more prominent place in it than in the *Harivaṃśa* veṚṣion. Moreover, this is another point at which the *Viṣṇu* asserts Kṛṣṇa's identity with *brahman*. It is the supreme *brahman*, not the Lord of the serpents (*Hv* 70.10–13), upon whom Akrūra meditates in the Yamunā (*Viṣṇu* 5.18.35), and this is echoed in his praise of Kṛṣṇa after emerging from the water: 'You who are unborn are that supreme *brahman*, eternal and unchanging' (*tad brahma paramaṃ nityam avikāri bhavān ajaḥ*, 5.18.53). Akrūra also praises Kṛṣṇa as '[all-]pervading, manifold yet essentially one in form' (*vyāpine naikarūpaikasvarūpāya*, v.48) and as 'both existing and nonexistent' (*sadasate*, v.57).

Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā

The events leading up to Kamsa's death, and the death itself, are told in much the same way as in the *Harivaṃśa*. In two respects, however,

the *Viṣṇu* differs from its predecessor. First of all the identity of Kṛṣṇa is more fully emphasised. When he and his brother enter the arena the first thought of the spectators is not to comment on how unevenly matched they are with their adversaries (although that comes later in 5.20.60–2). They begin by reminding each other of Kṛṣṇa's previous exploits (5.20.45–7) and say of him:

> This is an aspect of Viṣṇu who is the whole world and the origin of all, descended now on earth as the remover of her burden (*ayaṃ hi sarvalokasya viṣṇor akhilajanmanaḥ / avatīrṇo mahīm aṃśo nūnaṃ bhāraharo bhuvah* // 5.20.50)[16]

Secondly, the Viṣṇu tones down the savage ferocity with which Kṛṣṇa attacks his opponents in the *Harivaṃśa*.[17] The details of the fighting are less graphic: there are no eyes bursting out of sockets here, and Kamsa's death comes more quickly and without any reference to the agony described in *Hv* 76.31–4.

The *Viṣṇu* makes of Kaṃsa's death a more triumphant climax than does the *Harivaṃśa*. It is immediately followed by a meeting between the two boys and their parents, in which Vasudeva hails Kṛṣṇa as 'the Lord who has descended into my house' (*bhagavān avatīrṇo gṚhe mama*, 5.20.95), 'the maker of all beings, without beginning or end' (*kartā sarvabhūtānām anādinidhano*, v.100), and ends with:

> You are Viṣṇu, O lord, arrived for the good of the worlds; now that you have come to us, illusion has departed (*tvaṃ viṣṇur īśa jagatām upakārahetoḥ prāpto 'si naḥ parigato vigato hi mohah* // 5.20.105b)

Although Kṛṣṇa is said to express regret for Kaṃsa's death in *Viṣṇu* 5.21.8, less emphasis is placed on this than on the fact that he requests and receives from Indra the hall of the gods' king as a gift to Ugrasena,[18] whom he has just set upon the throne (5.21.13–17). The danger to Kṛṣṇa and the Yādavas from Jarāsaṃdha is also minimised by the *Viṣṇu*, which deals with the whole long struggle with the King of Magadha in one short chapter (5.22.1–18), presenting it as 'the master of the universe's game of living according to human rules' (*manuṣyadharmaśīlasya līlā sā jagatīpateḥ*, v.14, cf. v.18). Kṛṣṇa's building of Dvārakā is motivated by a desire to act out the part of the prudent general rather than by fear of the power of the Yādavas' enemies (5.23.9–12).[19]

Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā

The opening of this stage of Kṛṣṇa's life is less impressive in the *Viṣṇu* than in the *Harivaṃśa*. There is no mention of the city being built by Viśvakarman, and no attempt to connect Kṛṣṇa's bride Rukmiṇī with Śrī On the other hand, the story of Kṛṣṇa's flight from Kālayavana and

the latter's destruction by Mucukunda is made the occasion of Mucukunda's eulogy of Kṛṣṇa in 5.23.26–47, and there is a touch of irony in 5.23.17 when Kālayavana is said to pursue Kṛṣṇa 'who cannot be caught by the minds of great ascetics' (*mahāyogicetobhiḥ prāpyate na yaḥ*). Recognising him as Viṣṇu's *aṃśa* (v.26), Mucukunda sees him also as '… that *brahman* which is neither increased nor diminished, without beginning or end' (*avṚddhināśaṃ tad brahma … ādyantavivarjitam*, v.34b).[20] He also describes Kṛṣṇa as 'material and immaterial, both gross and most subtle' (*mūrtāmūrtaṃ tathā cāpi sthūlaṃ sūkṣmataraṃ tathā*, v.37a).

The Viṣṇu's account of Kṛṣṇa's slaying of Naraka is shorter than the *Harivaṃśa*'s, but it contains a new element, Earth's praise of Kṛṣṇa in 5.29.23–9. She says that Naraka was her son, born from Viṣṇu's contact with her when she was rescued by him in the form of a boar (v.23), and describes Kṛṣṇa as 'pervasion and what is pervaded; act, agent and effect' (*vyāptir vyāpyaṃ kriyā kartā kārya ca …*, v.27). Aditi also praises Kṛṣṇa when he returns the earrings which Naraka had stolen from her (5.30.6–23), again using paradoxical language: he is 'the essence of the *guṇas*, yet beyond the three *guṇas*' (*guṇātmaka / triguṇātīta …*, v.7). In the same episode Indra praises Kṛṣṇa as 'without beginning or middle or anything else' (*anādimadhyādyasmin …*, v.79), and later Śiva recognises Kṛṣṇa as 'the supreme lord the supreme Self, Hari without beginning or end' (*pareśaṃ paramātmānam anādinidhanaṃ harim*, 5.33.41).

Although the later chapters of *Viṣṇu* 5 thus present Kṛṣṇa as being lauded by all the celestial beings whom he encounters, it does not end on the same kind of triumphal note as the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Kṛṣṇacarita*. Instead *Viṣṇu* 5.37 relates the death of Kṛṣṇa, and 5.38 the ensuing powerlessness of Arjuna to defend Kṛṣṇa's family. In this it follows the *Mausalaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, although with several significant differences. In the *Mausalaparvan* Kṛṣṇa is depicted not so much as directly causing all that happens to the Yādavas and to himself and his brother, but rather as permitting the working out of three curses: that of the Ṛṣi*s* Viśvāmitra, Kaṇva and Nārada as a punishment for Sāmba's deception (*Mbh* 16.2.4–10), and those uttered against himself by Gāndhārī and Durvāsas (16.5.17). In the *Viṣṇu*'s account the episode in which Sāmba is punished by giving birth to an iron club is preceded by an introduction from Parāśara which suggests that the Ṛṣi*s'* curse simply sets in motion the events which Kṛṣṇa intends to happen:

> 1 Thus Kṛṣṇa, assisted by Baladeva, slaughtered Daityas and evil rulers for the sake of the universe. 2 In association with Phālguna [i.e. Arjuna], the all-pervading Lord removed the earth's burden by slaughtering all its armies, 3 After performing the removal of the earth's burden and killing all its kings, he destroyed his family on the pretext of a curse by brahmins. 4 Leaving Dvārakā, O sage, and abandoning his human nature, Kṛṣṇa

entered the sphere which he himself constituted as Viṣṇu, together with all his parts[21] (1 *evaṃ daityavadhaṃ kṛṣṇo baladevasahāyavān / cakre duṣṣakṣitīśānāṃ tathaiva jagataḥ kṚte // 2 kṣiteś ca bhāraṃ bhagavān phālgunena samanvitaḥ / avatārayāmāsa vibhus samastākṣauhiṇīvadhāt // 3 kṚtvā bhārāvataraṇaṃ bhuvo hatvākhilān nṚpān / śāpavyājena viprānām upasaṃhṚtavān kulam // 4 utsṚjya dvārakāṃ kṛṣṇas tyaktvā mānusyam ātmanaḥ / sāṃśo viṣṇumayaṃ sthānaṃ praviveśa mune nijam //* 5.37.1–4)

Besides this, the episode of Sāmba and the Ṛṣi*s* is immediately followed by one in which Kṛṣṇa privately receives a message from the gods, requesting him to return to heaven (5.37.16–21), and tells them that one more exploit is necessary before he returns: the annihilation of the Yādavas (vv22–7). They too are a burden upon the earth which must be removed (vv23,27). Here, as in 5.37.1–4, the frequent use of *bhārāvataraṇa* recalls the beginning of Kṛṣṇa's story (5.1.27,28). Just as in 4.24.138 'kings each perform their tiny share of Viṣṇu's work of maintenance' (*sthitipravṚttasya viṣṇor aṃśāṃśakā nṚpāḥ*), so Kṛṣṇa, who is also Viṣṇu's *aṃsāṃśa* has performed the great work of removing Earth's burden. His story completes the account of Viṣṇu's activity in preserving the universe, so that Book 6 can go on to describe its dissolution.

KṚṢṆA IN THE *HARIVAṂŚA* AND THE *VIṢṆUPURĀṆA*

However unalike the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* may be, the fact remains that they are based upon the same or similar material — and this is true of more than their *Kṛṣṇacaritas*. In both cases the composers of these texts are choosing which themes to highlight and how to arrange them. The composers of the *Harivaṃśa* wish to provide genealogical and theological introductions to the story of Kṛṣṇa, so they lay most stress upon the dynastic histories which lead to the latter's birth in the Vṛṣṇi clan, and select one particular encounter between the *devas* and the *asuras*, that of the Tārakāmaya war, to show Viṣṇu in Chapters 32–8 as a celestial hero, the gods' saviour.

The *Viṣṇu* dismisses the Tārakāmaya war in three verses (4.6.16–18), and makes no mention of Viṣṇu in connection with it. It is Rudra who is said to be the gods' leader (*rudrapurogamā devā*, v.17). Throughout the *purāṇa* there is little or no stress upon Viṣṇu's military prowess against the *asuras*. Whereas in the *Harivaṃśa* Kṛṣṇa's killing of Kaṃsa in Chapter 76 is prefigured by the death of Kālanemi in single combat with Viṣṇu in Chapter 38, in the *Viṣṇu* Kālanemi's death is not described, even though it is briefly mentioned in 5.1.22. The victories won by Viṣṇu over the *asuras* which are described at any length are achieved, not by physical force, but by deception and

cunning. Most of Viṣṇu's interventions in the *trailokya* are acts of self-revelation to some individual (e.g. to Dhruva in 1.11–12; to the Pracetas brothers in 1.15; to Prahlāda in 1.17–20).

The Viṣṇu's use of *pañcalakṣaṇa* material, when compared with the *Harivaṃśa*'s, reflects the fact that it is a text which presents itself in its own right, rather than attaching itself to a more prestigious text such as the *Mahābhārata*. It creates a panoramic view of the universe, emanating from, maintained by and reabsorbed into Viṣṇu/*brahman*. Viṣṇu may be seen at various times and in various places in this universe, guaranteeing its stability and/or providing focal points for human worship. The greatest of these focal points is Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu's *aṃśāṃśa*. In Book 5 he is projected so large upon the human screen that he fills the whole picture. Kṛṣṇa may be only a 'tiny fraction' of the Supreme God, but as the hearer/reader has learnt much earlier in the *purāṇa*, even 'in a part of his ten thousand times ten-thousandth part' (*yasyāyutāṃśāṃśe*, 1.9.53) Viṣṇu's power abides. The triple world is so insignificant compared with his immensity (cf. 5.7.50,64) that even his *aṃśāṃśa* is a figure of tremendous power and wisdom. The *Viṣṇu*'s vision is of Viṣṇu continually present throughout time and space, upholding and informing the whole universe, and Kṛṣṇa appearing at the time of the world's greatest crisis, when *asuras* have overrun the triple world. There is a constant polarity between Viṣṇu as the Supreme God transcendent, immanent and omnipresent, and Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God localised at one particular point in history. Yet at the same time, the way in which the *Viṣṇu* introduces its *Kṛṣṇacarita* after telling the stories in Book 4 of many kings who 'each perform their tiny share of Viṣṇu's work of maintenance' (… *sthitipravṛttasya viṣṇor aṃśāṃśakā*…, 4.24.138), suggests that Kṛṣṇa too is to be regarded as in some sense part of this line of kings rather than as Viṣṇu's sole earthly representative.

Another way of exploring the contrast between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa would be by considering a little further the words *rūpa* and *avatār a*. The word *rūpa* is connected with seeing.[22] When Viṣṇu reveals himself to the world in one of his innumerable *rūpas* he simply makes his presence perceptible without necessarily doing any more than just that. In the stories of Dhruva and Prahlāda, for instance, all the action and passion lie with the *bhakta*. Viṣṇu appears at the climax of the story, grants boons and disappears (1.12.41–95; 1.20.14–29). Kṛṣṇa's role of *avatāra* is far more active. The word itself calls up the action of descending, an action with a purpose: that of removing Earth's burden. Throughout Book 5, moreover, Kṛṣṇa is always at the centre of the action. He plays the role of both innocent victim, threatened from his earliest days by Kaṃsa's agents and other perils, and

invincible champion who defeats all enemies.

A development which might have been expected in the *Viṣṇu* is that the list of nine appearances of Viṣṇu in *Hv* 31 would be increased to ten. This expectation, however, is not fulfilled. For a list of ten, although not the standard *daśāvatāra* list, one has to look elsewhere, to the passage which appears in slightly different veṚṣions in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.73.72–105a/*Vāyu* 98.71–104 and *Matsya* 47.237–48. In both cases this list is divided into three 'celestial' (*divya*) manifestations and seven 'human' (*mānuṣya/mānuṣa*):[23]

Bd/Vāyu[24]		*Matsya*	
Divya		*Divya*	
Nārāyaṇa[25]	(vv72–3a/71–2a)	Part of Nārāyaṇa	(vv237–8)
Narasiṃha	(vv73b–4/72b–3)	NṚṣimha	(v.239)
Vāmana	(vv75–86/74–87)	Vāmana	(v.240)
Mānuṣya		*Mānuṣa*	
Dattātreya	(vv88b–9a/89)	Dattātreya	(v.242)
MāndhātṚ	(vv89b–90a/90)	MāndhātṚ	(v.243)
Jāmadagnya	(vv90b–1a/91)	Jāmadagnya	(v.244)
Rāma		Rāma	
Daśarathātmaja	(vv91b–2a/92)	Daśarathātmaja	(v.245)
Vedavyāsa	(vv92b–3a/93)	Vedavyāsa	(v.246)
KṚṣṇa[26]	(vv93b–103/94–03,ii)[27]	Buddha[28]	(v.247)
Kalki	(vv104–5a/104)	Kalki	(v.248)

Far from producing such a list as this, the *Viṣṇu*, as has just been seen, shows little interest in any *avatāra* list at all. Indeed, there is some justification for Hacker's opinion that in the *Viṣṇu* the *avatāra* idea is superfluous.[29] The muted treatment which it receives may be seen in the way in which the figures of Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana are presented, those three figures which appear to be the nucleus of the *avatāra* list and which were obviously important in that stream of tradition which is represented by the *Harivaṃśa*.[30]

In the *Viṣṇu* Varāha is the only member of the triad whose story is told in any detail (1.4). Yet, as in the parallel purāṇic veṚṣions, he is treated as a creator rather than as a saviour. He is said to be Brahmā as well as Nārāyaṇa (1.4.1,2,4,5). There is no suggestion that he is rescuing the earth from any malign agency. He brings it up from beneath the sea, straightens it out, divides it and reconstructs it as it was in the previous *kalpa*. Although the word *sthiti* is used in connection with this operation, the prevailing tone of 1.4 is that of a creation myth. The *Viṣṇu* adds a good deal to the *pañcalakṣaṇa* text, but what it adds (1.4.21–4,30,33–6,39,44,48,50–2) contains no ideas which change this tone to that of a true *avatāra* myth.

Hacker has pointed to the lack of emphasis upon Narasiṃha in the Prahlāda narrative. The story of Hiraṇyakaśipu's tyranny is focused so completely upon the Daitya king's relationship with his son and the latter's devotion to Viṣṇu that there is no room in it for Narasiṃha's killing of Hiraṇyakaśipu. Indeed, it would be inappropriate, since the story ends with Prahlāda asking Viṣṇu for forgiveness for his father, and the reconciliation of father and son (1.20.24,30–1). When Hiraṇyakaśipu's death is reported in 1.20.32, it appears to be an afterthought, added as though belonging to some other context.

Vāmana is mentioned in 3.1.42–3 as the form of Viṣṇu who protects the world in the present *manvantara*. His story is briefly summarised: his parents were Kaśyapa and Aditi, he 'conquered the world with three strides' and handed over his conquest to Indra. There is no mention of Bali and his sacrifice, nor of the dwarf's transformation into a cosmic giant. Information is kept to a minimum, so that the hearer/reader can know that this Vāmana is indeed the hero of the well-known story, without the story itself being allowed to interrupt the account of the *manvantaras*.

In spite of this neglect of major *avatāra* figures, there is evidence of the *Viṣṇu*'s awareness of *avatāra* sequences. Not only are there the passages which were discussed at the beginning of this chapter, but there are two verses which to refer to Viṣṇu's play (*līlā*) in varying forms. One is 5.33.42, where Śiva says to Kṛṣṇa:

> This play of yours which consists of assuming bodies among gods, animals and humans is the activity which characterises you, who are everything (*devatiryaṅmanuṣyeṣu śarīragrahaṇātmikā / līleyaṃ sarvabhūtasya tava ceṣṣopalakṣaṇā //*)

Then in 6.7.70b–1 Khāṇḍikya, speaking of the forms of Viṣṇu, tells Keśidhvaja:

> 70b The other great form of Hari is that cosmic form in all its diversity. 71 It produces all the energy-forms, divine, animal, human and the like, which are set in motion by his play (70b *tad viśvarūpavairūpyaṃ rūpam anyad dharer mahat //* 71 *samastaśaktirūpāṇi tat karoti janeśvara / devatiryaṅmanuṣyādiceṣṣāvanti svalīlayā //*)

Moreover, the *Viṣṇu*, unlike the *Harivaṃśa*, is fully aware of the vocabulary of the *avatāra* drama. It never employs *prādurbhāva* for Viṣṇu's appearances on the world's stage,[31] using *avatāra* for his manifestations generally (1.4.17; 1.9.142,144) and for Kṛṣṇa in particular (5.3.13; 5.7.9; 5.16.21). So if it shows little interest in *avatāra* lists, or in *avatāra* figures other than Kṛṣṇa, it is almost certainly because it wishes to direct the attention of its hearers/readers to the Supreme Reality, rather than letting them be distracted by any lesser form.

Chapter Six

The Bible of Kṛṣṇaism

Although scholars may have given the *Viṣṇu* a privileged position, there can be no doubt whatsoever that it is the *Bhāgavata* which has been the most influential of all the Purāṇas. It has been commented on from the standpoint of all the major Vedānta schools and has inspired new schools in its turn;[1] it has been rendered into many Indian vernaculars; its episodes have been depicted in countless sculptures and paintings. It has shaped the consciousness of millions of Hindus — not simply by its presentation of Kṛṣṇa's human life story, but by its total world-view and its interpretation of *bhakti*. Over the last hundred years its influence has been spread throughout the world by the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. As Charlotte Vaudeville has said, it is the 'real Bible of Kṛṣṇaism'.[2]

This view of the *Bhāgavata* is one which springs from the text itself. From first to last it seeks to impress its own importance upon the hearer/ reader. It not only declares itself, as do most *purāṇas*, to be 'equal to the Vedas' (*brahmasammitam*, 1.3.40; 2.1.8; 2.8.28). It is also 'the quintessence extracted from all the Vedas and the epics' (*sarvavedetihāsānāṃ sāraṃ sāraṃ samuddhṚtam*, 1.3.42), 'the essence of all the Upanisads' (*sarvavedāntasāram*, 12.13.12,15), the greatest of the *purāṇas* (12.13.16–17). It is the essence of the Vedas in a form which can be aesthetically savoured (1.1.3; 12.13.15), producing devotion to Kṛṣṇa (1.7.7), and leading to liberation (12.13.12). The *Bhāgavata*'s self-glorification is not only a matter of statements. It proclaims its closeness to the Veda by a deliberately archaising style, often elaborate and convoluted. As J. A. B. van Buitenen puts it, 'the *Bhāgavata*'s point is: I am not only orthodox in the Vedic tradition, I even sound like the Veda'.[3]

The *Bhāgavata* also emphasises its own authoritative character by deliberately evoking and identifying itself with prestigious texts. Its

opening words echo *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.2 (*janmādyasya yato* …), and this first verse ends with an echo of the *Gāyatrī*, as does also 12.13.19, which is almost the *Bhāgavata*'s last verse.[4] There are several echoes of the Ṛg*Veda*, particularly of the *Viṣṇusūkta* (1.154)[5] and the *Puruṣasūkta* (10.90).[6] There are also echoes of the *Nāsadīyasūkta (*Ṛ*V* 10.129) in *Bhāgavata* 3.27.11 and 8.3.5.) There are echoes of the *Gītā* in almost every book,[7] and Kṛṣṇa's teaching of Uddhava in 11.7–29 appears to be modelled upon his teaching of Arjuna in the *Gītā*.[8] A great deal of the *Bhāgavata*, particularly the section dealing with cosmic history, is modelled upon the *Viṣṇu*.

It is not simply a question of enhancing authority by evoking these texts. The *Bhāgavata* sees itself as the most authoritative text of all, able to reinterpret or even replace its predecessors. Not only does it proclaim itself to have a status equal to that of the Vedas: it also reinterprets Vedic themes, so that the *viṣṇor vīryāṇi* of Ṛ*V* 1.154.1 are transformed into the deeds of Kṛṣṇa (10.51.38).[9] It includes the later phases of the central story of the *Mahābhārata* within its framing narrative, but makes no direct reference to the *Bhagavadgītā*, so that Uddhava replaces Arjuna as the privileged recipient of Kṛṣṇa's teaching. As will be seen later, it seeks to oust the *Viṣṇu* from its position as the leading Vaiṣṇava *purāṇa*.

THE *BHĀGAVATAPURĀṆA* IN RELATION TO THE *HARIVAṂŚA* AND THE *VIṢṆUPURĀṆA*

All three texts make some reference to the *Mahābhārata* in their choice of interlocutors. The *Harivaṃśa* announces its continuity with the *Mahābhārata* by adopting the same two pairs of interlocutors (Sūta and Śaunaka; Vaiśaṃpāyana and Janamejaya) and the same setting (the sacrificial session in the Naimisa forest). The *Viṣṇu*'s interlocutors belong to an older generation than those of the *Mahābhārata*. The narrator is Parāśara, Vyāsa's father, and the story which he tells Maitreya is thus proclaimed to be more ancient than that told in the Epic, and to have its own authority which is independent of it. The *Bhāgavata* connects itself more closely to the *Mahābhārata* than the *Viṣṇu* does. It has the same two opening interlocutors, Sūta and Śaunaka, and the same setting, the Naimiṣa forest. Yet, unlike the *Harivaṃśa*, it does not use the *Mahābhārata*'s Vaiśaṃpāyana and Janamejaya as the interlocutors of its main narrative, but instead assigns these roles to Vyāsa's son Śuka, and Parīkṣit, the Pāṇḍavas' sole surviving heir, Janamejaya's father. Unlike the *Harivaṃśa* in

another respect also, the *Bhāgavata* does not present itself as a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*. The Ṛṣi*s* of the *Bhāgavata* make no reference to the Epic as having already been recited; the narrative which they request might be described as a new *Mahābhārata* which focuses more sharply than the old upon the glories of Kṛṣṇa.

Perhaps because of its intention to surpass the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata* picks up various themes and topics from the older text which are not found in the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*. Besides containing many echoes of the *Gītā*, it is the only one of the three texts which presents Kṛṣṇa as a teacher. In choosing Śuka as its narrator it links up with those passages in the *Mokṣadharma* (*Mbh* 12.168–353) which describe the relationship between him and his father Vyāsa (*Mbh* 12.309–20).[10] It makes use of the *Mokṣadharma*'s idea that VṚtra was a devotee of Viṣṇu.[11] In these borrowings from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata* imitates it or retells parts of its story (as in 1.7–16) in such a way as to subordinate the other figures in the Epic more completely to Kṛṣṇa.

The *Bhāgavata* appears to have no direct relation to the *Harivaṃśa*, but models itself in many respects upon the *Viṣṇu*. It is perhaps for this reason that in the list of *purāṇas* which it gives in 12.13.4–8, it prefixes with *śrī* two names only: its own and the *Viṣṇu*'s. The influence of the *Viṣṇu* is most plainly seen in Books 3–5, 9–10. In Books 3 and 4 the *Bhāgavata* itself suggests its debt to the *Viṣṇu* by making the narrator Maitreya, the sage who was the recipient of Parāśara's narrative in the *Viṣṇu*.[12] *Bhāgavata* 9, like *Viṣṇu* 4, gives the solar and lunar dynasties. *Bhāgavata* 10 appears to be dependent upon *Viṣṇu* 5 rather than upon the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Viṣṇuparvan*. When these two diverge on the order of the events in Kṛṣṇa's life, it is the *Viṣṇu* which the *Bhāgavata* follows.[13]

This dependence upon the *Viṣṇu* is not at all slavish. Far from regarding the *Viṣṇu* as an authority which must always be followed, the *Bhāgavata* seeks to establish its own authority over against it. Whereas the *Viṣṇu* has six books, the *Bhāgavata* has twelve. Whereas the *Viṣṇu* and the other *mahāpurānas* are *pañcalakṣaṇa*, the *Bhāgavata* declares itself to be *daśalakṣaṇa*. These ten topics are set out twice, in 2.10.1–7 and 12.7.8–20. Not only does each passage give a list of the topics (2.10.1; 12.7.9), but it explains the meaning of each item in the list. From these explanations it is obvious that the two lists are very close together, even though they are not identical (topics in block capitals are those which occur also in the *pañcalakṣaṇa* list):[14]

2.10.1	*12.7.9*
SARGA	*SARGA*
visarga (=PRAT1SARGA?)	*visarga*

sthāna	*vṚtti*
poṣaṇa	*rakṣā*
ūtayaḥ	*antarāṇi (= MANVANTARA?)*
MANVANTARA	*VAMŚA*
īśānukathā	*VAMŚĀNUCARITA*
nirodha	*samsthā*
mukti	*hetu*
āśraya	*apāśraya*

12.7.10 suggests that all *mahāpurāṇas* ought to be *daśalakṣaṇa*, and that any which, like the *Viṣṇu*, *are pañcalakṣaṇa*, must be minor *purāṇas*.[15] Rocher discusses the attempts of scholars 'to find a historical explanation for the appearance of the longer lists' and concludes that 'Baladeva Upādhyāya is probably right' in saying that 'the *daśalakṣaṇī* of the Bhāgavata is nothing more than an "expanded and enlarged" version of the *pañcalakṣaṇī*'.[16] Clifford Hospital makes the point that this is an 'expansion which takes into account more adequately both the idea of a cosmic process of creation, preservation and dissolution, and also certain theological ways of talking about the process' i.e. *nirodha/saṃsthā* is added to denote dissolution; the idea of preservation is filled out, particularly by *poṣaṇa/rakṣā*, so as to 'reflect a theological view of the activity of God in his *avatāras*'; *īśānukathā* redirects the view of the past from the traditional genealogies towards Hari's *avatāras* and followers.[17] It is unlikely, however, that this expansion and enlargement are motivated solely by theological considerations. The *Bhāgavatas* determination to assert its superiority over the *Viṣṇu* is almost certainly also a factor.[18]

Another way in which the *Bhāgavata* appears to be doing this is in the matter of its narrator. Whereas the *Viṣṇu* attempted to increase its authority by declaring itself to have been composed by Vyāsa's father, Parāśara, the *Bhāgavata* adopts the opposite device in order to claim the hearer's attention. Its chief narrator is not Vyāsa's father but his son Śuka. It is implied that Śuka is in some ways superior to his father: he is marked out as greater than Vyāsa by his early renunciation (1.2.2), and his childlike innocence and total lack of involvement in human affairs (1.4.4–8). The choice of Śuka as narrator may be taken to imply that although this *purāṇa* has all the authority of antiquity, it is also bringing something fresh and new into the picture.[19] Thus the revelation from Parāśara, which Maitreya passes on to Vidura, is relegated to becoming something of an 'old dispensation', particularly as it is given a subordinate position in the text as a whole, by being brought within the overarching perspective of Śuka's recital to Parīkṣit.

Before considering the structure of the *Bhāgavata*, a few words must

be said about the relationship of each text to the purāṇic genre as a whole. The *Harivaṃśa* is a very early *purāṇa*, so early that it identifies itself with the later stages of the *Mahābhārata* rather than with the Purāṇas as a recognised type of literature. The *Viṣṇu* seems very much at home in the purāṇic genre, arranging its traditional *pañcalakṣaṇa* and *bhuvanavinyāsa* material in such a way as to convey its own theological message about the supremacy and accessibility of Viṣṇu. The *Bhāgavata* goes beyond the boundaries of the purāṇic genre, using a much wider range of lyric metres than other *purāṇas*,[20] and giving the impression of being a literary composition from the start rather than being rooted in the oral tradition to which the Purāṇas originally belonged. Its composers have chosen to use the purāṇic genre, but their aim was to create a text which went beyond that genre, surpassing even the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* in its authority.

Yet although the *Bhāgavata* transcends the purāṇic genre[21] there is one respect at least in which it takes pains to keep alive the purāṇic tradition. The dialogue between its interlocutors, Śuka and Parīkṣit, appears to reflect the kind of discussion which would arise between the reciter of a *purāṇa* and its audience in the days of oral composition. Some of these discussions will be touched upon later in this book: e.g. the conversations about whether Kṛṣṇa is impartial in his treatment of his friends and enemies (7.1.1–32), and about his behaviour with the *gopīs* (10.33.27–37). Parīkṣit and Śuka also discuss the expiation of sins in 6.1.1–19, and some of Parīkṣit's questions about individual *avatāras* (e.g. Vāmana in 8.15.1–2; Matsya in 8.24.1–3) seem to spring from debate as to what forms and activities are appropriate for the Lord's adoption. Other characters also open up questions,[22] so that the *Bhāgavata* incorporates into its narrative far more discussion than either the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu* does.

THE KṚṢṆA-SHAPED COSMOS

Although the structure of the *Bhāgavata* is influenced by the *Viṣṇu*, it is very far from being determined by it. The *Bhāgavata* accommodates what it has taken from the *Viṣṇu* within its own framework and uses it for its own ends. Its structure is designed to express its own viewpoint. The centrality and ultimacy of Kṛṣṇa which it proclaims can be seen throughout the whole *purāṇa*. This should emerge more clearly from a detailed examination of (i) the *Bhāgavata*'s frame-narrative (1; 12.6–13), (ii) its cosmic history (2–9; 12.1–5) and (iii) its account of Kṛṣṇa's life and teaching (10– 11).

The frame-narrative (*Bhāgavata* 1; 12.6–13)

To be precise, the *Bhāgavata* has two frame-narratives, since 1.1–4.13 is an introductory conversation between Śaunaka and the Ṛṣi*s*, and 1.4.14 onwards is his narrative introducing Śuka and Parīkṣit, and explaining how they come to be the interlocutors of the main narrative. Its opening in the Naimiṣa forest has already been mentioned. What Śaunaka and the other Ṛṣi*s* require from Sūta here is information on three topics; the essence of religion (1.1.11); 'the noble acts of him who assumes forms in play' (*tasya karmāny udārāṇi … līlāyā dadhataḥ kalāḥ*, 1.1.17); and the refuge of *dharma* now that Kṛṣṇa is no longer on the earth (1.1.23). The replies to these requests are given in the next two chapters. Sūta explains to the Ṛṣi*s* that the highest *dharma* which they are seeking is that which leads to 'disinterested and irresistible devotion to Adhokṣaja [i.e. Kṛṣṇa], which sets the mind completely at rest' (*bhaktir adhokṣaje / ahaituky apratihatā yayā 'tmā samprasīdati*, 1.2.6). He deals with the second topic at greater length, enumerating the twenty forms which have already been assumed by the Lord and the two which he will assume in the future (1.3.6–25). As for the refuge of *dharma*, this is the *Bhāgavata* itself, the replacement for Kṛṣṇa in the *kaliyuga* (1.3.43b–44a). Therefore the dialogue between Sūta and the Ṛṣi*s* provides an introduction to the *purāṇa* proper. It links *dharma* with *bhakti*, and suggests that the God who will be extolled in this *purāṇa* is active within his universe. The rest of *Bhāgavata* 1 sets the scene for this recital, explaining in careful detail the *purāṇa*'s origin and the circumstances in which it came to be recited.

First of all Sūta introduces Vyāsa, sitting despondently by the sacred river Sarasvatī and wondering why he should feel so dissatisfied with his spiritual state (1.4.14–31). He has done what he could to make divine knowledge available to the human race. He has divided the Veda into four to make it more accessible, and composed the *Mahābhārata* so that those who were not eligible to recite or hear the Vedas might learn from that. Even so:

> 30 Although, alas, my embodied self is powerful in itself, it seems to lack something, while surpassing all others in the splendour which springs from sacred knowledge. 31 Is it perhaps because I have not considered the religious beliefs and practices of the Lord's devotees, cherished as they are by the greatest ascetics, and indeed cherished by Acyuta? (30 *tathāpi bata me daihyo hy ātmā caivātmanā vibhuḥ / asampanna ivābhāti brahmavarcasya sattamaḥ* // 31 *kiṃ vā bhāgavatā dharmā na prāyeṇa nirūpitāḥ / priyāḥ paramahaṃsānāṃ ta eva hy acyutapriyāḥ* // 1.4.30–1)

At this point Nārada appears and confirms Vyāsa's own diagnosis, explaining to him that he has not yet sung the glories of Kṛṣṇa (1.5.8–22). This conversation leads Vyāsa to compose the *Bhāgavatā*, 'through hearing which arises devotion to Kṛṣṇa the Supreme Being' (*yasyāṃ vai śrūyamānāyāṃ kṛṣṇe paramapūruṣe / bhaktir utpadyate* …, 1.7.7).

Having explained how the *purāṇa*'s composition came about, Sūta turns to the two figures who are to be responsible for the unfolding of the story. Śuka has already been described. Parīkṣit is also a significant figure, appropriate to be the recipient of this narrative. He owes his entire being to Kṛṣṇa, who restored him to life in his mother's womb when struck by Aśvatthāman's fearful missile (1.8). He is now king in Hastināpura, keeping at bay the *kaliyuga* which has entered the world with Kṛṣṇa's death (1.17.38–45), but he knows that his own death is imminent and shows his willing acceptance of this by fasting on the bank of the Ganges as he waits for the snake-bite which will end his life (1.19.7).[23] With his death the world will lose its last immediate link with Kṛṣṇa, and the *kaliyuga* will become dominant. Thus Parīkṣit's situation mirrors that of any listener to this *purāṇa*: deprived of Kṛṣṇa's physical presence, in a world threatened by the *kaliyuga*, he turns eagerly for comfort and strength to Śuka and to the narrative which he brings.

In presenting Parīkṣit's story in detail it may seem at first sight as though Sūta is making a great détour from the main theme of the frame-narrative. It includes several episodes already related in the *Mahābhārata*: Aśvatthāman's massacre (*Bhāgavata* 1.7.14), the death of Bhīsma (1.9.25–45), Kṛṣṇa's departure from Hastināpura to Dvārakā (1.10–11), the withdrawal from the world of DhṚtarāṣṣra, Gāndhārī and Vidura (1.13), the Pāṇḍavas' grief at Kṛṣṇa's death and their ascent to heaven (1.15). But this is not irrelevant material, inasmuch as it introduces Kṛṣṇa into the frame-narrative, not only as the all-important character in Parīkṣit's story, but as one who inspires reverence and affection in all who encounter him (e.g. Arjuna, 1.7.22–5; Kuntī, 1.8.18–22; Bhīṣma, 1.9.10,18; other friends in Hastināpura, 1.10.9–10; his subjects in Dvārakā, 1.11.6–9). As has already been noted, it also retells important parts of the *Mahābhārata* story, centring them more firmly upon Kṛṣṇa.

Between this introductory portrait and Kṛṣṇa's complete story in Book 10 the whole account of the creation and maintenance of the universe is narrated, thus suggesting that this history is contained within Kṛṣṇa's story. 1.19 leads into this narrative: just as the Ṛṣi*s* had put their questions to Śaunaka, so Parīkṣit asks Śuka what someone about to die ought to contemplate in order to attain beatitude (1.19.37–8). In both cases the questions are requests for insights into the nature of religion rather than for information in the strict sense.

At the end of the *Bhāgavata* the frame-narrative is rounded off. After describing the dissolution of the cosmos, Śuka delivers his final message to Parīkṣit in 12.5. The king declares his complete satisfaction with Śuka's recital and says that he no longer fears death

(12.6.2–7). He is bitten by the snake Takṣaka and dies (12.6.12–15), but not before he has become one with *brahman* (vv.10,13). His son Janamejaya performs a snake sacrifice to avenge him (12.6.16–28). The remaining chapters (12.7–13) consist of Sūta's answers to various questions from the Ṛṣi*s*. This gives him the opportunity to tell the story of how Mārkaṇḍeya experienced the cosmic deluge and encountered a divine child within whose body the whole universe exists (12.9), which is surely intended as a reminder of Kṛṣṇa (cf. 10.7.34–7; 10.8.32–45). The last two chapters of Book 12 give Sūta's review of the contents of the *Bhāgavata*, with a list of the rewards for hearing, reciting and studying it (12.12), and its praise among all the other *purāṇas* in 12.13.3–21. At 12.12.45 Sūta refers back to the Ṛṣi*s*' original questions:

> And thus, O distinguished brahmins, I have answered your questions here; the deeds of the *līlāvatāras*[24] have been described in full (*iti coktaṃ dvijaśresthā yat pṚṣṣo 'ham ihāsmi vah / līlāvatārakarmāni kīrtitānīha sarvaśah //*)

The cosmic history

Stories of creation (*Bh* 2–4): What stands out from *Bhāgavata 2*'s account of creation is how frequently it is connected with meditation upon the form of the Lord (*bhagavān*). First of all Śuka's reply to Parīkṣit's question in 1.19.37–8 directs the king towards such contemplation. This is reminiscent of the yogic exercise described in *Viṣṇu* 6.7, but here it is said to be yoga 'characterised by devotion' (*bhaktilakṣaṇaḥ*, 2.1.21). Śuka then goes on to say in 2.2 that contemplation of the Lord's form was the starting point for Brahmā's recreation of the world. It is not until 2.5 that the story of creation actually begins, with Śuka reporting a conversation in which Brahmā tells Nārada what he himself has learnt from Hari: the basic evolutionary process of the primal creation (2.5.17–31), followed by the formation of the cosmic egg and the emergence from it of the Cosmic Man (*puruṣa*), comprising yet at the same time transcending the universe (2.5.32–6.45). This leads into an enumeration in 2.7 of the Cosmic Man's chief *avatāras* — a list which differs in its number and composition from that of 1.3.

Brahmā is at first at a loss as to how to create, and acquires the necessary understanding only after a thousand years of *tapas* have won him a vision of the Lord (2.9.5–16), a vision to which he responds with the overwhelming emotion which typifies *bhaktas* (v.17). He then relates to Nārada the *bhāgavataṃ purāṇaṃ daśalakṣaṇam* (2.9.43).[25] 2.10.1–7 explains these ten characteristic topics, and the rest of the chapter completes the account of creation and promises in 2.10.47 to explain the various measurements of time.

At this point the text reverts to the interlocutors of the first frame-narrative, Śaunaka and Sūta. Śaunaka reminds the Bard that he had previously referred to the travels of Vidura (1.13.58). Now he wants to know where Vidura met Maitreya, and what the latter told him (2.10.48–50). In this way the *Bhāgavata* incorporates part of the *Viṣṇu*'s tradition into Books 3 and 4, putting it into a position which is secondary to the celestial narrative told by Brahmā to Nārada[26] and giving it its own framing introduction and conclusion. The introduction consists of 3.1.1–3.5.17, and presents Vidura as a pilgrim visiting holy places after fleeing the Kaurava court. He meets Kṛṣṇa's devoted follower Uddhava (3.1.24), who tells him of Kṛṣṇa's death (after first running through all the events of his life, as though he is trying to delay the moment when he must say that his master is dead). On receiving this painful news, Vidura asks Uddhava to give him the 'supreme wisdom' (*jñānaṃ param*, 3.4.25) which will help him to understand all this, and Uddhava says that he must obtain help from the Ṛṣi Maitreya (3.4.26). When Vidura finds Maitreya at Haridvāra (3.5.1) the latter begins at the beginning with his own version of creation. There are several resemblances between this and the creation story of Book 2, and it leads, in 3.11, to just such an account of the measurements of time as had been promised in 2.10.47.

Book 4 follows *Viṣṇu* 1.10–15 fairly closely as far as the over-all scheme is concerned,[27] but Book 3 reorganises the *Viṣṇu*'s material and makes a significant addition to it. The reorganisation is seen in the *Bhāgavata*'s treatment of the story of Varāha. Whereas in the *Viṣṇu* Varāha's raising of the earth is simply part of the process of creation, the *Bhāgavata* brings together (although presenting them as two distinct tellings of the story, one after the other) Varāha's raising of the earth (3.13) and his killing of the Daitya Hiraṇyākṣa (3.14–19). The birth of Hiraṇyākṣa and his brother Hiraṇyakaśipu, sons of Kaśyapa and Diti, is only mentioned in passing at *Viṣṇu* 1.15.141, but *Bhāgavata* 3.14–17 relates this in detail, explaining that Hiraṇyākṣa and Hiraṇyakaśipu were once the celestial door-keepers, Jaya and Vijaya, of Viṣṇu's heaven, Vaikuṇṣha. Because they refused entrance to Sanatkumāra and his brothers they were cursed by them to spend three lives as enemies of Viṣṇu and to regain their original station as a result of having had each of their lives ended by Viṣṇu.[28]

The *Bhāgavata*'s significant addition is the story of Kapila (3.21–33), not so much a story as the setting for an exposition of Sāṃkhya by the sage regarded as its founder, said here to be an *avatāra* of the Lord. In view of the Sāṃkhya type of evolution described earlier in Book 3 as the means whereby the first creation came into being, it is appropriate to have this exposition at so early a stage. Not only does

God provide the basic elements of the universe (2.5.17–31), but he gives the key to understanding them as well.

The forms of the Lord in space (*Bh* 5): Book 5 (which is partly in prose) is made up of the same major components as *Viṣṇu 2*: cosmography and the story of Bharata, although the *Bhāgavata* reverses the *Viṣṇu*'s order and tells Bharata's story first. In its cosmography the *Bhāgavata* shows itself to be both following the *Viṣṇu* and improving on it. It follows the *Viṣṇu* in describing the nine *varṣas* of the central island-continent Jambūdvīpa. But it goes much further than the *Viṣṇu* in describing the worship of the Lord in the other eight *varṣas* besides Bhārata. Whereas the *Viṣṇu* had a form of Viṣṇu residing in only four of the *varṣas*, the *Bhāgavata* has a form for each one. These *varsas* are described in 5.17.14–19.28, each with their own form of the Lord being worshipped there. Moreover, the *Bhāgavata* brings all the *varsas* within the orbit of *bhakti*. In each *varsa* the worship of the Lord is led by a figure who is an appropriate *bhakta* of that particular form:

Varsa	*Devotee*	*Form of the Lord*
Ilāvṛta	śiva	Saṃkarṣaṇa
Bhadrāśva	Bhadraśravas (son of Dharma)	Hayaśiras[29]
Harivarṣa	Prahlāda	Narasiṃha
Ketumāla	Lakṣmī	Kāma
Ramyaka	Vaivasvata Manu	Matsya
Hiraṇmaya	Aryaman (ruler of the *pitṛs*)	Kūrma
Uttara Kuru	Bhūdevī	Varāha
Kiṃpuruṣa	Hanumān	Rāma
Bhārata	Nārada	Nara-Nārāyaṇa

In some instances the appropriateness of the leading *bhakta* is immediately obvious, e.g. Prahlāda leads the praise of Narasiṃha, Hanumān leads the praise of Rāma. The first *bhakta* in the list, however, may be somewhat surprising. It is Śiva who worships Saṃkarṣaṇa, the form of the Lord for Ilāvṛta — another instance of the affinity between Śiva and Saṃkarṣaṇa which has already been remarked in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, as well as in other *purāṇas*.[30]

From the nine *varṣas* the *Bhāgavata* passes on to the seven *dvīpas* which make up the extent of the earth's surface. As in the *Viṣṇu* again, there is a form of the Lord which is worshipped in each *dvīpa*. When the two lists are compared they are seen to consist of more or less the same names, arranged in different sequences:

Dvīpa	*Bhāgavata* 5.20	*Viṣṇu* 2.4
Plakṣa	Sun	Moon
Śālmalī/a	Moon	Wind
Kuśa	Fire	Brahmā
Krauñca	Water	Rudra
Śaka	Wind	Sun
Puṣkara	Brahmā	No worship by human beings[31]

Again the *Bhāgavata* goes further than the *Viṣṇu*; this time in saying that at the outermost edge of the earth, the Lokāloka mountains, the Lord himself abides in his own form:

> In order to strengthen with manifold powers the world-guardians who are manifestations of his own might, the Lord who is the Supreme Great Being and the master of all great powers, the pure substance of the inner controlling Self, characterised by *dharma*, wisdom, freedom from worldly desires, dominion and the rest, and the eight supernatural powers, surrounded by his principal attendants such as Viśvaksena, adorned with his own excellent weapons, and with his long strong arms, sits on all sides of this excellent mountain supporting the whole world for its prosperity (*teṣāṃ svavibhūtīnāṃ lokapālānāṃ ca vividhavīryopabṛṃhaṇāya bhagavān paramamahāpuruṣo mahāvibhūtipatir antaryāmy ātmano viśuddhasattvaṃ dharmajñānavairāgyaiśvaryādyaṣṣamahāsiddhyupalakṣaṇaṃ viśvaksenādibhiḥ svapārṣadapravaraiḥ parivārito nijavarāyudhopaśobhitair nijabhujadaṇḍaiḥ saṃdhārayamāṇas tasmin girivare samantāt sakalalokasvastaya āste* // 5.20.40)

But it has nothing corresponding to the *Viṣṇu*'s statement that at the centre of the universe, in Jambūdvīpa, Viṣṇu is worshipped as the sacrifice personified (*yajñapuruṣa, Viṣṇu* 2.3.21). The various forms under which the Lord is worshipped in the *varṣas* appear to suffice for the *Bhāgavata*, and no figure is provided for Jambūdvīpa as a whole. This may perhaps be because the *Bhāgavata* sees Kṛṣṇa, and not the sacrifice, at the heart of the universe.

As in the *Viṣṇu*, the Lord has special forms for the highest and the lowest points of the universe. The Sun is identified as 'this Primal Man who is the Lord Nārāyana in person' (*eṣa bhagavān ādipuruṣa eva sākṣān nārāyaṇo*, 5.22.3), and in 5.23.4,8 the Lord is said to be present in the Śiśumāra constellation. Then beneath all the lower regions of the earth is 'the Lord's tāmasic form' (*kalā bhagavatas tāmasī*, 5.25.1), the cosmic serpent Ananta. The *Bhāgavata* concludes Book 5 by declaring that the whole universe is 'the lord's large-scale body' (… *īśvarasya sthūlaṃ vapuḥ* …, 5.26.40).

The Lord's universal grace (*Bh* 6–7): While the *Viṣṇu* moves from the universe's extent in space to its extent in time, the *Bhāgavata* postpones this until Book 8, and turns in Books 6 and 7 to a theme which is perhaps suggested by the description of the hells with which Book 5 has just closed, that of the Lord's grace towards anyone who

turns to him with devotion, regardless of how immoral the person may be or what position in the *trailokya* he may hold. Thus the great sinner Ajāmila is saved from hell simply by calling out the name 'Nārāyana' with his youngest son in mind, whose name it is (6.1.29–31).[32] As 6.2.49 explains:

> If Ajāmila who died invoking Hari's name, applying it to his son, attained the supreme state, how much more shall one who invokes [that name] through faith? (*mriyamāṇo harer nāma gṚṇan putropacāritam / ajāmilo 'py agād dhāma kiṃ punaḥ śraddhayā gṚṇan //*)

The story concludes with a conversation between Yama and his messengers, in which Yama tells his servants that they can never have any power over those who are devoted to the Lord.[33]

Although the Lord's grace is the dominant theme of Books 6 and 7, it is incorporated into the *Bhāgavata*'s account of the earliest families of Ṛṣi*s* and kings. Thus in 6.4 Śuka tells Parīkṣit of the Pracetas brothers and their marriage to Mariṣā who becomes by them the mother of Dakṣa. Through the latter's daughters the entire world becomes populated with all manner of beings. The genealogy which is related in 6.6 introduces TvaṣṣṚ and his son Viśvarūpa, who becomes the gods' *guru* (6.6.45) and is eventually killed by Indra because, as the son of an *asura* mother he secretly offers a share in the sacrifice to the *asuras* (6.9.3–4). This leads into a retelling of the story of Indra and VṚtra, in which VṚtra is said to be a devotee of the Lord.[34] Thus when VṚtra is killed by Indra, he merges into the Supreme Being (6.12.35), and his devotion to the Lord is explained by the story of his previous life as King Citraketu who became the ruler of the *vidyādharas* but was then cursed by Śiva to be reborn as an *asura*. The introduction of this explanatory story appears to be the *Bhāgavata*'s own idea.

After this interpretation of Viṣṇu's role in the Indra-VṚtra conflict it is perhaps strange that Book 7 should open with Parīkṣit asking Śuka to explain why the Lord should side with Indra against the Daityas (7.1.1). The question is designed, however, to lead into Nārada's story of Śiśupāla's former life as Hiraṇyakaśipu; here the compilers of the *Bhāgavata* appear to be combining the *Viṣṇu*'s picture of Prahlāda as a youthful devotee of Viṣṇu with the more traditional myth of Narasiṃha's punishment of Hiraṇyakaśipu's arrogance. Prahlāda, like Nārada himself, from whom he is said to have acquired his knowledge of the Lord (7.7.2–16), is depicted both as an example of *bhakti* and a teacher of it (7.5.23–4; 7.6.1–28; 7.7.17–55). Thus *asuras* like Prahlāda and VṚtra can be devotees of the Lord, and even the impious tyrant Hiraṇyakaśipu can receive his grace (7.8.56).

The forms of the Lord in time (*Bh* 8): The *Bhāgavata* only hints at the possibility of Viṣṇu-forms for each *kalpa*. 3.11.34–6 suggests that the various *kalpas* have names, the present one being the *vārāhakalpa* and the previous one the *pādmakalpa*. Although Lotus as well as Boar can be regarded as the name of an *avatāra*,[35] it does not seem as though the *Bhāgavata* is suggesting that every *kalpa* has its *kalpāvatāra*.[36] Neither is there anything which corresponds to *Viṣṇu* 3.2.54–9, where an appropriate form of Viṣṇu for each of the four *yugas* is specified. However there is a less specific reference to *yuga*-forms in 8.14.8:

> And according to the *yuga*, Hari declares knowledge in the form of a *siddha*, ritual in the form of a Ṛṣi and yoga in the form of a master of yoga (*jñānaṃ cānuyugaṃ brūte hariḥ siddhasvarūpadhṚk / Ṛṣirūpadharaḥ karma yogaṃ yogeśarūpadhṚk //*)

The one unit of time for which the *Bhāgavata* consistently declares that the Lord has a form is the *manvantara*. The word *manvantarāvatāra* occurs only once, in 12.12.19, but the idea runs all through Book 8, which opens with Parīkṣit asking Śuka to go on from the first *manvantara* of Svāyambhuva Manu, and give him an account of the other Manus. Śuka begins by looking again at the period of Svāyambhuva Manu: just as his daughter Devahūti was enlightened by the Lord in the form of her son Kapila in this period, so his other daughter Ākūti was enlightened by the Lord in the form of her son Yajña. No account of Ākūti's enlightenment is given, however. Instead Śuka relates how Manu is attacked by *asuras* while engaged in *tapas*:

> Then seeing them dwelling there Yajña, the omnipresent Hari, surrounded by the Yāma gods, killed them and ruled over heaven (*tāṃs tathāvasitān vīkṣya yajñah sarvagato hariḥ / yāmaiḥ parivṚto devoir hatvāśāsat triviṣṣapam //* 8.1.18)

The reference to Hari ruling over heaven is curious, because, as was seen in the case of the *Viṣṇu* and will be seen in the case of the other *manvantaras* here, the Viṣṇu-figure for each *manvantara* is usually distinct from the Indra whose function it is to rule over heaven as the king of the gods, whereas the former presides over the whole *manvantara* and its lesser rulers who include the Manu and the Indra.

The other *manvantaras* are described at various points in Book 8 (8.1.19–29; 8.5.1–10; 8.13.1–6). Their names correspond with those given in *Viṣṇu* 3.1 and elsewhere although the names of the Viṣṇu- and Indra-figures for the *manvantaras* do not always agree.[37] In *Bhāgavata* 8.13.7–36 the future *manvantaras* are described, going beyond the account of them in *Viṣṇu* 3.2.13–48 by giving a Viṣṇu and an Indra for each one.[38] The greatest difference between the *Bhāgavata*'s treatment of the *manvantaras* and the *Viṣṇu*'s, however, is not at the level of names, but in the fact that the *Bhāgavata* interweaves into these lists of names stories of God's activity in

various *manvantaras*: e.g. Hari's rescue of the elephant king in the Tāmasāntara (8.2–4); the churning of the ocean and related events in the Cākṣuṣāntara (8.5–12); the story of Vāmana (8.15–23), the form of Viṣṇu which is the special protector of this present age of Vaivasvata Manu; Matsya's rescue of King Satyavrata from the cosmic flood (8.24).

The solar and lunar dynasties (*Bh* 9): In its accounts of the solar and lunar dynasties, the *Bhāgavata* mostly highlights the same names in the dynasties and takes them in the same order as the *Viṣṇu*. From time to time it expands the *Viṣṇu*'s material considerably. Sometimes this is in order to emphasise the importance of *bhakti*; e.g. the story of Ambarīṣa, who is simply mentioned in passing at *Viṣṇu* 4.2.6, is told in two chapters (9.4–5). Sometimes it is in order to give greater prominence to an *avatāra*; e.g. Rāma Dāśarathi (9.10–11; cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.4.87–103) and Rāma Jāmadagnya (9.15.1–16.27; cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.7.17–36; 4.11.20).[39] The most significant change which the *Bhāgavata* makes in the order of the *Viṣṇu* is that it leaves the dynasty of Yadu until the end of Book 9, so that the brief mention of Kṛṣṇa there (9.24.55–67) thus leads directly into the *Kṛṣṇacarita* of Book 10. The Syamantaka episode is transferred to 10.56–7. In the *Viṣṇu*, however, the line of Yadu is dealt with in 4.11–15, and the account of the royal dynasties ends in 4.21.1–24.69 with the kings of the *kaliyuga*. The *Bhāgavata* keeps these back until after Kṛṣṇa's story has been told in Books 10 and 11, so they appear in 12.1.

The end of the cosmic history (*Bh* 12.1–5): These five chapters mark the end of Śuka's recital to Parīkṣit and blend together elements found in *Viṣṇu* 4.21–4 and 6.1–7. The *kaliyuga* dynasties are given in 12.1 (cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.21.1–24.69), and their enumeration leads into a description of the *kaliyuga* in 12.2 (cf. *Viṣṇu* 6.1). Then *Bhāgavata* 12.3.1–15 takes up the theme of *Viṣṇu* 4.24.123–37, Earth's mockery of the ambitions of kings to own and dominate her, and adds to it the thought that devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the cure for such vain ambitions (12.3.14–15). The rest of *Bhāgavata* 12.3 deals with the subject matter of *Viṣṇu* 6.2: in spite of all its evils the Kali age has one great advantage over the other three in that ‘simply through praising Kṛṣṇa one may be freed from attachments and attain the highest state’ (*kīrtanād eva kṛṣṇasya muktasangaḥ paraṃ vrajet*, 12.3.51b). Then 12.4 describes the different types of *pralaya* (cf. *Viṣṇu* 6.3–7) and 12.5 gives Śuka's parting message to Parīkṣit.

Kṛṣṇa's life and teaching (*Bhāgavata* 10–11)

Although Kṛṣṇa is on stage in the early books of the *purāṇa*, it is not

until Book 10 that his full story begins. In the main the *Bhāgavata* follows the *Viṣṇu* in its ordering of the events of Kṛṣṇa's life, but there are many new incidents, mostly in the account of his childhood and adolescence. His dealings with the *gopīs*, and with women in general, are far more prominent in the *Bhāgavata* than in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*. The Syamantaka episode is located in its chronological place in the account of Kṛṣṇa's adult life (10.56–7), and there are several chapters which, like Book 1, connect him with the events and characters of the *Mahābhārata* (10.70.22–78.16).

Book 10 is much longer than any other book in the *Bhāgavata*. Yet even so, it does not include Kṛṣṇa's whole story. It ends with him as a powerful and triumphant figure, and it is left to Book 11 to relate his death after recording the teaching which is his testament to his devout follower Uddhava. It has already been remarked that Kṛṣṇa's teaching of Uddhava in 11.7–;29 is largely modelled upon the *Gītā*. The chief theme is *bhakti*. Kṛṣṇa recommends to Uddhava listening to and singing his stories (11.11.23) and *satsanga*, 'associating with good people' (i.e. other *bhaktas*, 11.11.25). He describes to him in 11.11.29–48 the life of the ideal *bhakta*, whose every activity is focused upon the worship of Kṛṣṇa and who sees him in everything. *Satsanga* is commended again in 11.12.1–15, and the *gopīs*' attitude in particular is praised (vv8–13). In 11.14.23–6 Kṛṣṇa describes the physical signs which should indicate the intense emotion of the true *bhakta*, and in 11.19.20–4 gives another picture of the *bhaktas* activities:

> 20 Faith in my life-giving stories, constant proclamation of me, being skilled in [my] worship, praising me in hymns, 21 reverence in service, prostration of oneself in salutation, paying special honour to my devotees, perceiving me in all beings, 22 performing [all] physical activities for my sake, uttering my qualities in song, fixing one's mind upon me, abandoning all desires, 23 giving up for my sake wealth and enjoyment, and pleasure too, [performing] for me worship, giving, sacrificial offering, the repetition [of my names], the observance of vows and austerities, 24 O Uddhava, by these duties of men who have dedicated themselves to me, devotion to me comes into being; what other aim [in life] is left for such a one? (20 *śraddhāmṚtakathāyāṃ me śaśvan madanukīrtanam / pariniṣṭhā ca pūjāyāṃ stutibhiḥ stavanaṃ mama //* 21 *ādaraḥ paricaryāyāṃ sarvangair abhivandanam / madbhaktapūjābhyadhikā sarvabhūteṣu manmatiḥ //* 22 *madartheṣv angaceṣṭā ca vacasā madguṇeraṇam / mayy arpaṇaṃ ca manasaḥ sarvakāmavivarjanam //* 23 *madarthe 'rthapārityāgo bhogasya ca sukhasya ca / iṣṭaṃ dattaṃ hutaṃ japtaṃ madarthaṃ yad vrataṃ tapaḥ //* 24 *evaṃ dharmair manuṣyāṇām uddhavātmanivedinām / mayi saṃjāyate bhaktiḥ ko 'nyo 'rtho 'syāvaśiṣyate //*)

This concentration on *bhakti* does not mean that other types of discipline are neglected. Kṛṣṇa expounds yogic meditation to Uddhava in 11.14.32–15.36, and the rituals pertaining to *āśramadharma* in 11.17–18. But it is *bhakti* which is regarded as the highest and surest way to attain to Kṛṣṇa, who presents himself as the supreme goal (11.14.20; 11.20.31–3).

Kṛṣṇa's teaching may usefully be seen in three contexts: the immediate context of Book 11, that of Books 10 and 11 taken together as the two books which deal most directly with Kṛṣṇa, and that of the *purāṇa* as a whole. In Book 11, Kṛṣṇa's teaching separates the events in the first chapter which lead up to his death from the account of that death, together with all his clan, in the last two chapters. This not only softens the violence of the ending, but leaves a more hopeful impression in the mind of the hearer/ reader. Instead of *Viṣṇu* 5.38's picture of Arjuna's desolation at finding his strength gone now that Kṛṣṇa is dead, *Bhāgavata* 11.29 presents Uddhava withdrawing to the *āśrama* at Badari to ponder the words which Kṛṣṇa has entrusted to him.

In the context of Books 10 and 11, the teaching of Kṛṣṇa provides a commentary upon the life which has just been portrayed. Although, as the next chapter shows, Kṛṣṇa often appears as a didactic figure in Book 10, his teaching is mainly through his actions, or through relatively short comments. Nor does he theorise about *bhakti* in Book 10. It is in the wider context of the *purāṇa* as a whole that such theorising takes place. Teaching by 'the great followers of the Lord' (*mahābhāgavatas*)[40] on 'the discipline of devotion' (*bhaktiyoga*) and 'the religious beliefs and practices of the Lord's devotees' (*bhāgavatadharma*) is given at various points throughout the *purāṇa* (Śuka, 2.1.8–11;[41] Kapila, 3.25–33; Nārada, 4.8.40–61; 4.25–9; 4.31.9–22; 7.11.5–15.77; Ṛṣabha, 5.5.1–27; Prahlāda, 7.6). In Book 11 itself Kṛṣṇa's teaching is immediately preceded by that of Ṛṣabha's sons in Chapters 2–5. This serves as a reminder that Kṛṣṇa's *bhaktiyoga* (cf.11.14.2; 11.19.8; 11.20.8,33; 11.25.32) is an ancient discipline which has been expounded in the distant past (not only by Ṛṣabha, but also by Kapila, 3.25.44); that what he proclaims as 'my *dharma*' (11.26.1; 11.29.9,44) is none other than the *bhāgavatadharma* which has been taught down the ages (cf. 1.4.31; 5.4.12).

Book 10 will be examined in the next chapter. Although it may be, and often is, treated as a story which is complete in itself, it acquires greater meaning when it is seen as the heart of the whole *purāṇa* and the focal point of the *Bhāgavata*'s history of the cosmos, establishing Kṛṣṇa at its centre. It is the life presented in Book 10, rather than the teaching of Book 11, which is Kṛṣṇa's chief legacy to his devotees.

Chapter Seven

Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*

Of the *Bhāgavata*'s twelve books, Book 10 is undoubtedly the best-known and best-loved. It contains the most appealing and significant images of Kṛṣṇa: the child who contains the universe within himself, the boy who can displace a mountain with a flick of his fingertip, the lover whose attractions outweigh all ties of duty. For many people in India and in other parts of the world, Book 10 **is** the *Bhāgavata*, and their knowledge of the rest of the *purāna* may be scanty compared with their deep familiarity with this book alone.[1] Of all the purānic versions of Kṛṣṇa's story, this is the one which has made the greatest impact upon the hearts and lives of those who have heard and read it. Yet the story told in *Bhāgavata* 10 is not in its main outline different from that which is told in earlier versions. For the hearer/reader its value does not lie in novelty, but in the life-giving quality of the narrative, just as it did for Parīkṣit when he heard it from Śuka.

Although the *Bhāgavata*'s story of Kṛṣṇa is so like the versions in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, it is given a new significance in its retelling. This is done partly by the reinterpretation of the well-known story and partly by the introduction of new episodes, particularly in the narrative of Kṛṣṇa's childhood. This chapter will look at the *Bhāgavata's Kṛṣṇacarita* under two headings: the retelling of the old story, already told in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, and the new episodes which are woven into it. Then it will compare the three *Kṛṣṇacaritas* with each other.

RETELLING THE OLD STORY

It is not always easy to distinguish between the old and the new in the *Bhāgavata*. The old is often refreshed and rejuvenated, while the new is often so skilfully blended with the old that it merges completely

with it. In attempting to make some kind of separation, I shall deal with new touches to old stories here, and in the next section with completely new stories. Occasionally there will be stories which demand a mention in both sections.

The descent of the sods and the birth of Kṛṣṇa

The account of the gods' descent which Śuka gives to Parīkṣit in 10.1.15–25 is far briefer than that of the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*. Strictly speaking, it cannot be called an account of a descent. No part of the verb *ava*is used in it, and there is nothing to suggest that the gods are meeting on Mt Meru or any other lofty place from which they might descend. What is emphasised is not so much that the gods are above the earth as that the Supreme Person (*puruṣaḥ paraḥ*, v.23) is far above the gods. Their spokesman Brahmā does not come into the Supreme Person's presence, but simply hears his 'Voice uttered in the sky' (*girim … gagane samīritām*, v.21). The voice instructs the gods to 'be born with aspects of yourselves among the Yadus' (*bhavadbhir aṃśair yaduṣūpajanyatām*, v.22).

By shrouding the Supreme Lord in mystery, the *Bhāgavata* makes sure that the human Kṛṣṇa is not given a celestial counterpart who might be regarded as controlling his actions from outside. Presumably for this same reason there is no detailed account, as in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, of Viṣṇu working behind the scenes to bring about the birth of Devakī's first six children. All that the *Bhāgavata* gives is a brief episode (10.2.6–15), in which 'the Lord who is the universe's Self' (*bhagavān api viśvātmā*, v.6) commands Yogamāyā[2] to transfer Devakī's seventh foetus into Rohinī's womb and herself be born as Yaśodā's daughter. The conception of Kṛṣṇa is described in terms which, without eliminating the role of his father[3], point to some kind of mental, rather than physical contact between Devakī and Vasudeva. Once this has taken place Devakī's radiance is so great as to make Kaṃsa realise that she is bearing Hari (10.2.20) and to bring the gods to sing the praises of the child in her womb (10.2.25–42),[4] thus reinforcing the idea that God is to be located in Kṛṣṇa and not in some extraterrestrial figure.

As in the *Viṣṇu*, Kṛṣṇa is born in four-armed form with all the weapons and ornaments of the Supreme God of the Vaiṣṇavas (10.3.9–10). Both his parents recognise him as the Supreme Person (*purusa para*, 10.3.12,13,31) and praise him as *brahman* (10.3.19,24), but, as in *Viṣṇu* 5.3.12–13, Devakā asks him to lay aside his marvellous form, for fear of Kaṃsa (10.3.29–31). Before he becomes an ordinary baby (10.3.46), Kṛṣṇa tells his parents that this is the

third time that he has been born from them: when they were Sutapas and PṚśni he was their son PṚśnigarbha (10.3.32–41), and when they were Kaśyapa and Aditi he was Upendra or Vāmana (v.42). He has revealed his form to them now in order to remind them of these past births.

Once Kṛṣṇa is in completely human form his father, aided by Yogamāyā, takes him to Nanda's settlement and brings Yasodā's daughter back with him to Mathurā (10.3.47–53). Kaṃsa kills the baby girl, who then reveals herself as an eight-armed form of the Goddess and tells him that his future killer is still alive somewhere. When his *asura* allies hear of this, they vow to kill not only 'those children who are within the ten days [of impurity after childbirth] and those outside the ten days' (*anirdaśān nirdaśāmś ca … śiśūn*, 10.4.31), but also all those who maintain Hari's visible body (i.e. brahmins, reciters of the Vedas, ascetics, sacrificers and cows, 10.4.39–42).[5]

Kṛṣṇa's early miracles

As far as the three main episodes of Kṛṣṇa's earliest childhood are concerned, the *Bhāgavata* keeps to the same general lines as the earlier versions. On the surface its story of Pūtanā is very much the same as the *Viṣṇu*'s, although told in greater detail. But it is summed up in 10.6.44 as 'the liberation of Pūtanā' (*pūtanāmoksa*),[6] and this is indeed what it is. When Pūtanā's gigantic body is chopped up and burnt by the cowherds, the smoke from the pyre is said to be as fragrant as aloe wood (10.6.34) because her sins have been destroyed. Śuka ponders this sign in vv35–40: if Pūtanā's pretence of maternal love for Kṛṣṇa could win her liberation, how much more easily could it be won by those women or cows who gave him their milk through true love? Thus, although the cowherds themselves are still said to be ignorant of what has happened, it is Śuka's understanding, rather than their ignorance, which impresses itself upon the hearer/reader.

The baby Kṛṣṇa's second exploit, kicking over a heavy cart, is said to take place on the occasion of his *utthāna* ceremony,[7] which is, like his birth ceremony, described as an occasion of lavish display on Nanda's part (10.7.4'5,15).[8] His third miracle, the uprooting of the *arjuna* trees is reinterpreted in two ways. First of all, Yaśodā's attempt to tie her naughty child to her mortar to keep him out of further mischief is transformed into a symbol of God's dealings with his *bhaktas*. The rope which Yaśodā uses is found to be always too short, however many extra lengths she ties on to it (10.9.15–17).[9] Indeed it could not possibly be long enough to bind one who is described in

these terms:

> He who has neither inside nor outside, neither front nor back; he who is the front and the back, the inside and the outside of the universe; he who is the universe itself (*na cāntar na bahir yasya na pūrvam nāpi cāparam / pūrvāparaṃ bahiś cāntar jagato yo jagac ca yaḥ* // 10.9.13)

When he sees Yaśodā exhausted, Kṛṣṇa feels sorry for her and allows himself to be bound, thus demonstrating, says Śuka to Parīkṣit, 'his subjection to his servants' (*bhṚtyavaśyatā*, v.19).

Secondly, the episode becomes another example of Kṛṣṇa's liberating power. The trees which the baby uproots by dragging his mortar between them are said to be two *guhyakas*, [10] Nalakūbara and Manigrīva (10.9.22–3), and the story is related in 10.10.1–23 of how they were cursed by Nārada to become trees for 'a hundred celestial years' (*divyaśaracchate*, v.22) until Vāsudeva restores them to their 'heavenly state' (*svarlokatām*, v.22). Thus Kṛṣṇa's action is no longer the spontaneous behaviour of an exploring child, but the result of his intention to make good Nārada's words:

> The divine ṛṣi is most dear to me. Because they are Kubera's sons I shall therefore bring to pass what the great man said (*devaṚṣir me priyatamo yad imau dhanadātmajau / tat tathā sādhayiṣyāmi yad gītam tan mahātmana* // 10.10.25)

When the trees are uprooted Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva stand before Kṛṣṇa in their original forms and worship him. They pray that they may become his *bhaktas*, devoting their whole bodies to his service (v.38). Kṛṣṇa accepts their new-found devotion and says that they can now go to their own dwelling (v.42).

Kṛṣṇa's triumphs over Kāliya and Indra

The next familiar exploits which the *Bhāgavata* retells are said to take place after Nanda and the other cowherds have moved to VṚndāvana. Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are now at the *paugaṚḍa* stage,[11] no longer minding calves only (10.15.1), but cowherds in the full sense. Although they continue to live a carefree life (e.g. 10.15.9–18; 10.18.1–16), the character of Kṛṣṇa's exploits changes, as it does in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*. Whereas at the *kaumāra* stage the usual pattern was for him to be attacked by some *asura* and to kill it in self-defence, now his deeds are more often on behalf of his community than on his own behalf.[12] He restores to life the cowherd boys who have drunk Kāliya's poison (10.15.47–52) and punishes Kāliya himself, expelling him from the Yamunā and purifying its waters (10.16). Twice he saves the community from a forest fire (10.17.21–5; 10.19).[13] He deliberately challenges Indra (10.24.12) by initiating a change in worship that he believes will benefit the cowherds, and when Indra retaliates, sending

a flood to overwhelm them, Kṛṣṇa shelters them by plucking up Mt Govardhana and holding it over them (10.25). He rescues his foster father Nanda from the power of Varuna (10.28). Even in the case of Dhenuka, who is killed by Rāma (10.15.20–40), the story is presented in such a way as to suggest that Kṛṣṇa and Rāma together deliberately court this danger in order to free the palm grove from the power of the *asuras* (vv20–8) and make it available as a playground for the boys of the community.

The broad outlines of the Kāliya story are more or less the same in the *Bhāgavata* as in the two earlier versions. But there is no speech by Rāma to remind Kṛṣṇa of his identity, neither does the *Bhāgavata* attempt to present this story and the Pralamba episode as companion pieces. The special relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his brother which the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* bring out particularly in this episode is not absent from the *Bhāgavata*, but it is not emphasised until a later stage in Kṛṣṇa's life. At present, Rāma is simply his brother's lieutenant among the boys of VṚndāvana.[14]

In the victory over Indra the parallels made in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* between Kṛṣṇa and Vāmana are played down: Indra says nothing about Kṛṣṇa's being Upendra when he proclaims him as Govinda (10.27. 23).[15] What is important for the *Bhāgavata* is the way in which Kṛṣṇa humbles Indra's pride as an act of grace towards him (10.27.15–16), so that Indra takes refuge in him and becomes his *bhakta* (v.13). The scene becomes a parallel to that between Kṛṣṇa and Brahma in 10.14,[16] so that each god in turn is seen submitting to Kṛṣṇa as his devotee and receiving his grace.

Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā

As in the two earlier versions of his story Kṛṣṇa's return to Mathurā is the result of a visit from Akrūra, sent by Kaṃsa to invite him and his brother to come back to the city. This visit is described in terms very similar to those used by the *Viṣṇu*, but there are two particularly significant differences: Akrūra recognises the two boys as *purusa* and *pradhāna* (10.38.15,32), in Sāmkhya terminology the two basic realities of the universe; and in his vision in the Yamunā it is the figure seated upon Śeṣa's lap, never named, but clearly indicated as Viṣṇu by his weapons and ornaments, who is the focal point of the whole scene, described in ten verses (10.39.46–55), whereas Śeṣa is described in only two (w44–5).

In the *Bhāgavata*'s version of the events in Mathurā the element of secrecy which was so stressed in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* has disappeared. Kṛṣṇa and Rāma enter Mathurā in the company of their

young cowherd friends (10.41.19, 24). This crowd of boys follows Kṛṣṇa around the city, receiving garments from him after he has killed the dyer (10.41.32–9), listening to his conversation with the hunchback girl Trivakrā (10.42.11), being received with presents by the merchant community (10.42.13), and finally accompanying the brothers into the arena where, as in *Viṣṇu* 5.20.81, they join them in a merry dance when all Kaṃsa's wrestlers have been defeated. Nothing could be less like the *Harivaṃśa*'s account of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma secretly exploring Mathurā.

The two brothers impress the citizens of Mathurā as being more than human:

> Perceiving their marvellous prowess, energy, boldness and handsomeness, the inhabitants of the city regarded them as the two greatest gods (*tayos tad adbhutam vīryaṃ niṣāmya puravāsinah / tejaḥ prāgalbhyaṃ rūpaṃ ca menire vibuddhottamau //* 10.42.22)

They have already been recognised by the garland-seller as 'the supreme cause of the whole universe' (*viṣvasya jagataḥ kāraṇaṃ param*, 10.41.46), and for the spectators in the arena:

> These two are Lord Hari Nārāyaṇa in person, who has manifested aspects of himself by descending here in Vasudeva's house (*etau bhagavataḥ sākṣād dharer nārāyanasya hi / avatīrṇāv ihāṃśena vasudevasya veśmani //* 10.43.23)

The effect of the sight of Kṛṣṇa upon the women of Mathurā is particularly devastating (41.24–9,31). They become confused (v.25), leave their tasks, however urgent (v.26) and envy the cowherd women (who had earlier envied them) for having been so closely associated with Kṛṣṇa (10.41.31; cf. 10.44.13–16).

Like the *Viṣṇu*, the *Bhāgavata* has a fairly restrained account of the death of Kaṃsa and the other deaths which immediately precede it. Rather than dwelling upon the physical agonies suffered by Kaṃsa at Kṛṣṇa's hands, it describes his mental panic after hearing that his great bow has been broken. On the last night of his life, portents of death crowd in upon him (10.42.26–31). His obsessive hatred of Kṛṣṇa is stressed in 10.44.33. There is no suggestion after his death that Kṛṣṇa feels any kind of remorse towards Kaṃsa's widows. On the contrary, the widows themselves say that their husband's plight was the result of his disregard of Kṛṣṇa (10.44.47–8).

The *Bhāgavata* shows a concern for tying up loose ends at this point in the story which is shared neither by the *Viṣṇu* nor the *Harivaṃśa*. Besides installing Ugrasena as king in his son's place (vv12–14), Kṛṣṇa also welcomes home those who have left Mathurā during Kaṃsa's rule. To the meeting with Vasudeva and Devakī related in *Viṣṇu* 5.20.95–105 is added another with Nanda in which Kṛṣṇa sends him and his people home with words of afffection and gratitude. The

Bhāgavata alone says that Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are invested with the sacred thread at this point (10.45.26–30), and that Sāndīpani teaches them 'the whole of the Vedas, with their auxiliary branches and Upanisads' (*vedān akhilān saṅgopanisada*, v.33) as well as the use of weapons.

Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā

The main features of Kṛṣṇa's life in Dvārakā for the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu are* his triumphs in battle over enemies both human and supernatural. These reappear in the *Bhāgavata*'s version of the story, but with a new emphasis on *bhakti*. Although *Bhāgavata* 10, like many other purāṇic books, contains gruesome descriptions of battle scenes[17], the note of *bhakti* is nevertheless frequently sounded. Of the five chief opponents whom Kṛṣṇa kills at this stage (Pauṇḍraka, Ṛiśupāla, Ṛālva, Dantavaktra and Vidūratha), three are said to merge with him in their death, just as this is said of Kaṃsa because his mind had been continually concentrated on Kṛṣṇa in fear (10.44.39; cf. 10.2.24). Paundraka becomes one with him because he has always tried to imitate him (10.66.24). Ṛiśupāla, as the third birth of Jaya, (cf. 3.15–16), has been fostering hatred and anger towards Kṛṣṇa for three lifetimes, and therefore attains identity with him (10.74.46). Dantavaktra also merges with Kṛṣṇa (10.78.10): he is elsewhere said to be Jaya's brother Vijaya in his third life-time (7.1.32; 9.24.37).[18] Besides this, some of the other characters who appear in these episodes speak to Kṛṣṇa very much in the style of *bhakti*. For example, Mucukunda asks forgiveness for spending so much of his life without thinking about him (10.51.49–50) and requests the boon of serving him (10.51.57); Nārada describes Yudhiṣṣhira as Kṛṣṇa's *bhakta* (10.70.40); the kings whom Kṛṣṇa liberates from the power of Jarāsamdha speak of his grace (*anugraha*, 10.73.9; *anukampā*, v.13).

The second distinctive feature is the way in which the *Bhāgavata* reuses epic as well as purāṇic material, incorporating its own shortened veṚṣions of episodes from the *Mahābhārata* into the narrative at this stage, for instance, Bhīma's killing of Jarāsaṃdha in 10.72–3 (cf. *Mbh* 2.18–22) and the death of Śiśupāla at Yudhiṣṣhira's *rājasūya (Bhāgavata* 10.74; *Mbh* 2.33–42). In 10.82–4 Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by his family and their retinue, together with other prominent members of the Vṣṣṇi clan, meet the kings of allied tribes (10.82.13–14), including the Kauravas and the Pāndavas (vv24–6), and also Nanda and his cowherds (v.32) at Samantapañcaka (vv2–3).[19] Since it is a new episode, parts of this will be considered in the next section, but it belongs with the older *Mahābhārata* material in being used by the *Bhāgavata* to bring together the epic and pastoral

aspects of Kṛṣṇa's life, adding weight to its implicit claim to be a new *Mahābhārata*, focused upon Kṛṣṇa rather than upon the Pāṇḍavas.

NEW EPISODES IN THE *BHĀGAVATA'S* STORY OF KṚṢṆA

As well as retelling the stories told by the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, the *Bhāgavata* also introduces a number of new episodes in its *Kṛṣṇacarita*. This does not necessarily mean producing stories which were entirely unknown before: J. S. Hawley has shown that many episodes in Kṛṣṇa's story had appeared in temple sculpture long before they appeared in any text.[20] The most significant of these new episodes can be gathered together under three main headings, presenting Kṛṣṇa (i) as cosmic child, (ii) as divine lover, and (iii) as friend of brahmins. The idea of the cosmic child is already present in Mārkandeya's vision of the baby asleep on the banyan leaf floating in the cosmic ocean (*Mbh* 3.186.81–6), identified with Kṛṣṇa in *Mbh* 3.187.50–5. The figure of Kṛṣṇa as divine lover has already been noted in connection with the *Viṣṇu*'s treatment of his dealings with the *gopīs*. Even so, the *Bhāgavata*'s approach to these themes involves it in telling new stories which are obviously intended to point up these aspects of Kṛṣṇa's significance.

The cosmic child

In between the second and third of Kṛṣṇa's childhood exploits, the *Bhāgavata* introduces two new stories. First of all, his foster mother Yaśodā suddenly finds him too heavy to hold (10.7.18–19),[21] and puts him down on the ground, where he is carried off by TṚṣāvarta, an *asura* in the form of a whirlwind (v.20). The cloud of dust which this stirs darkens the settlement for an hour, with Yaśodā and the other women bewailing Kṛṣṇa's loss. But TṚṣāvarta is no more able than Yaśodā to bear Kṛṣṇa's weight, and the child has him by the throat in a relentless grip. He falls lifeless to the ground, with the child still clinging to him (v.28), and the cowherd community is amazed at what it regards as Kṛṣṇa's lucky escape (vv30–1).[22] The other story appears in two versions, one in 10.7.34–7 and the other in 10.8.32–45. In the first Yaśodā is suckling the infant Kṛṣṇa when he yawns, and, gazing into his open mouth, she sees the whole universe. The second version is linked with another motif which is new to the *Bhāgavata*, even though it has antecedents in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, which both describe Kṛṣṇa and his brother as lively little boys, getting dirty, running all over the settlement and pulling the calves' tails (*Hv* 52.7–

12; *Viṣṇu* 5.6.10–12). But now in the *Bhāgavata* there is a new emphasis, with new stories which are not told in detail, but briefly mentioned in 10.8.29–31 where Kṛṣṇa's pranks alone are described. The other cowherd women complain to Yaśodā about how badly he behaves in their houses. This bad behaviour includes the theft of butter which later comes to be regarded as one of the most characteristic features of the child Kṛṣṇa's behaviour.

After the *gopṣs*' complaint in 10.8.29–31 the *Bhāgavata* goes on to tell of another complaint against Kṛṣṇa, this time by Rāma and the other boys, who say that he has been eating earth. Once again Yaśodā looks into her son's mouth and sees the universe (vv36–8). For a moment she grasps the truth about Kṛṣṇa (w40–2), only to have him veil it from her again:

> Then upon the cowherd woman's knowledge of the truth the all-pervading Lord spread Viṣṇu's deluding power composed of her affection for her son (*itthaṃ viditatattvāyāṃ gopikāyāṃ sa īśvaraḥ / vaiṣṇavīṃ vyatanon māyāṃ putrasnehamayīṃ vibhuḥ* // 10.8.43)

The motif of swallowing occurs also in further exploits of the child Kṛṣṇa. The two occasions on which he rescues the settlement from a forest fire by swallowing it (10.17.21–5; 10.19), neither of them mentioned in the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*, both demonstrate his ability to contain all things within himself, even harmful and dangerous elements.[23]

There are also stories in which Kṛṣṇa himself is swallowed. After the cowherds have moved to VṚndāvana, he kills Baka, an *asura* in the form of an enormous crane, who begins by swallowing him and discovering that he cannot contain him (10.11.48–50). Vomited out of the monster's mouth, Kṛṣṇa destroys him by pulling apart the two halves of his beak (v.51). A more wholesale swallowing now takes place, however, when Kṛṣṇa and the other *gopa* boys see what they take to be a mountain cave which looks like the open mouth of a huge python (10.12.18–23). All the boys except Kṛṣṇa[24] rush into this cave, but he knows that this really is the open mouth of a huge python, or rather (and more dangerously) that this is Agha, the younger brother of Baka and Pūtanā (*bakībakānujaḥ*, v.14),[25] who has taken the form of a python in order to kill all the cowherd boys (vv14–16). However, after a pause for reflection (vv27–8) Kṛṣṇa follows his companions through the *asura*'s mouth and into his throat. Here he increases in size until Agha chokes to death (vv30–1). Restoring his friends and their calves, Kṛṣṇa leads them safely out of the *asura*'s mouth (vv32–3). As he himself comes out, a brilliant light from the dead monster enters into him, showing that, like his sister, Agha has found union with the Supreme Being (vv33,38).

Both Parīkṣit and Śuka are fascinated by the story of Agha. Parīkṣit asks Śuka to tell it again (10.12.40) and is intrigued by the statement that Kṛṣṇa performed this feat when in the *kaumāra* stage of childhood, but his playmates did not celebrate it until they were all at the *pauganda* stage (v.41). Was this delay because of Hari's *māyā* (v.42)? At first Śuka cannot answer this question, because contemplation of Kṛṣṇa has caused him to swoon, but when he recovers consciousness he tells Parīkṣit another story which is the culminating point of this series of episodes (v.44).

Śuka explains that Brahmā too was fascinated by the Agha episode. Desiring to see another such feat, he took the opportunity to abduct the boys of Vrndāvana and their calves during the celebratory picnic to which Kṛṣṇa had invited them on the sandy bank of the Yamunā (10.13.4–6). While Kṛṣṇa searched for the calves which had strayed away during their meal, Brahmā gathered up both boys and calves and vanished with them (v.15). Yet even the creator Brahmā could not trap Kṛṣṇa into his game and had to play on Kṛṣṇa's terms in the end. The mothers and the cows of Vrndāvana all received their young ones safely home in the evening, because Kṛṣṇa knew that this disappearance was Brahmā's doing (v.17) and multiplied himself to take the form of every boy and every calf (v.19), so that:

> In this way Kṛṣṇa amused himself for a year in the forest and in the settlement, tending himself in calf form while himself in the guise of the boys who kept the calves (*ittham ātmā 'tmanā 'tmānārn vatsapālamisena saḥ / pālayan vatsapo varsam cikrīḍe vanagoṣṣayoh* // v.27)

This not only bewildered Brahmā, but had a strange effect upon the cowherd community. Because each of these young creatures was in fact the supreme reality (*paraṃ brahma*, v.22), their mothers, human and bovine, came to love them more intensely than their 'real' children (vv22–6). Only Kṛṣṇa's brother Rāma guessed the cause of this, and asked Kṛṣṇa to explain it to him (w35–9).

Brahmā realised that his own power of deception had come up against a superior power (vv40–5). Gazing at the cowherd children, he saw them transformed before him. First they all appeared in the likeness of Kṛṣṇa (vv46–50); then he saw them being worshipped by all beings (vv51–3); then he saw that all of them were 'forms of the one essence consisting of nothing but truth, knowledge and infinite bliss' (*satyajñānānantānandamātraikarasamūrtayah*, v.54a) — they were in fact 'all identical with the supreme *brahman*' (*parabrahmātmano 'khilān*, v.55). Becoming utterly confused, Brahmā could see no more until Kṛṣṇa restored his sight of the everyday world (v.58). There in that world was the forest of VṚndāvana, and in that forest Kṛṣṇa, '*brahman* without a second, supreme, infinite and of unfathomable

understanding' (*brahmādvayam param anantam agādhabodham*, v.61) was playing at being a young child, holding in his hand a morsel of food from his picnic meal as he searched for his friends and their calves. Brahmā prostrated himself before Kṛṣṇa and sang his praises (10.14.1–40). As for the boys and their calves, they were restored to the same sandy bank from which they disappeared, without having the least idea that they had been away from Vrndāvana for a year, and praising Kṛṣṇa for killing Agha 'today' (*adya*, v.48).

In his praise of Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā shows the same humility and wonder which were evident in 2.6.33–7, when he confessed to Nārada his lack of comprehension of the Lord who was the source of his existence and of the universe. He asks Kṛṣṇa to allow him to be one of his people throughout however many births he may have (v.30), and envies the cowherd community its friendship with him (vv31–2). He points out that Kṛṣṇa's self-manifestations to Yaśodā and his own deception by Kṛṣṇa are valuable lessons as to the true nature of the universe (vv16–18). His whole speech amounts to a declaration that he is Kṛṣṇa's *bhakta*.

As if to confirm that all other gods are subject to the child Kṛṣṇa, the *Bhāgavata* follows the Govardhana story with an episode in which Nanda is abducted by an *asura* servant of Varuna while performing ablutions in the Yamunā (10.28.1). Kṛṣṇa reclaims his foster father from Varuna, who greets him with reverence and apologies (10.28.5–8), and implores his grace (*anugraham*, v.8). Nanda's return leads into a further wonder, when Kṛṣṇa bestows upon the cowherds the experience of seeing him in his supreme state (vv16–17).

With the exception of this last episode, all the new stories which the *Bhāgavata* tells about Kṛṣṇa's childhood belong to its earliest phase, the *kaumāra* stage (up to and including five years old). It is evident throughout the whole *purāṇa* that this stage is important to the composers of the *Bhāgavata*. Many of the Lord's 'great devotees' (*mahābhāgavatas*) are said to have been his worshippers from the age of five (Nārada, 1.6.8; Uddhava, 3.2.2; Dhruva, 4.12.42; Prahlāda, 7.5.36). The *kaumāra* stage is important for the interlocutors of the *Bhāgavata* also: Śuka renounced the world in his earliest years (1.2.2), and Parīkṣit imitated Kṛṣṇa in his childhood play (2.3.15).

The divine lover

Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*: By the introduction of new stories (Kṛṣṇa's stealing of the *gopīs'* clothes while they bathe, 10.22; his creation of multiple forms so that he can partner every girl in the *rāsakrīḍā*, 10.33) and far more dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, the

Bhāgavata greatly enhances the importance of this aspect of Kṛṣṇa's life in Vrndāvana. As the stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood have already suggested, the effect of Kṛṣṇa's beauty and charm upon the female members of the cowherd community becomes apparent from his early years. Their joy at his return home in the evening is described in 10.19.16:

> The herder women's highest bliss was to see Govinda, without whom a moment was like a hundred ages to them (*gopīnāṃ paramānanda āsīd govindadarṣane / kṣanaṃ yugaśatam iva yāsāṃ yena vinābhavat //*)

The sound of his flute in the distance draws from them a song of love and praise in 10.21.7–19, expressing the delight felt by the whole of nature at the sight and sound of Kṛṣṇa. It is at this stage also that Kṛṣṇa steals the *gopīs*' clothes while they are bathing (10.22). Although this is said to take place at the end of a period of fasting and worship of the goddess Kātyāyanī undertaken by the young unmarried girls with a view to securing Kṛṣṇa as a husband (10.22.1– 7), the tone of the episode is not truly erotic. Instead it is presented as another display of Kṛṣṇa's yogic power, so that 'the Lord Kṛṣṇa, the master of [all] yoga masters' (*bhagavāṃs … krsno yogeśvareśvaraḥ*, v.8) is at one and the same time a young boy laughing with his comrades at the naked girls' predicament (v.9) and the Lord who can command anything of his devotees (vv16,19).

Not until 10.29, however, does Kṛṣṇa himself hold out any invitation to the girls:

> And seeing the nights adorned with autumn-flowering jasmine, the Lord decided to enjoy himself with the help of his yogic power (*bhagavān api tā rātrīḥ śaradotphullamallikāḥ / vīkṣya rantuṃ manaś cakre yogamāyām upāśritaḥ //* 10.29.1)

This opening sets the tone of Kṛṣṇa's behaviour as far as the *Bhāgavata* is concerned. It is at pains to make clear that he is not driven by lust in his relations with the *gopīs*, but is acting in a controlled manner out of disinterested compassion towards them. for this reason Kṛṣṇa is presented as receiving the *gopīs* coldly when they first come to join him in the forest (10.29.18–27). He tells them that they should return to the settlement (v.19); they are causing anxiety to their families (v.20); they should be waiting upon their husbands, suckling their children, milking their cows (v.22). He admits that they may have come to him out of affection:

> Or perhaps you have come, compelled in your hearts by your affection for me? That is fitting for you: [all] creatures hold me dear (*athavā madabhisnehād bhavatyo yantritāśayāḥ / āgatā hy upapannaṃ vaḥ prīyante mayi jantavaḥ //* 10.29.23)

But against this affection which all living beings feel towards him must be set their wifely duty (vv24–6). Therefore they must return to

their husbands and concentrate only their minds on him:

> Attachment to me springs from hearing, seeing, meditating, proclaiming, and not by proximity. So go back to your homes (*śravaṅād darṣanād dhyānān mayi bhāvo 'nukīrtanāt / na tathā saṃnikarṣeṇa pratiyāta tato gṚhān* // 10.29.27)

The women reply to Kṛṣṇa with a plea which combines metaphysical argument (he is the true *ātman* of all beings and thus takes precedence over husbands or relatives, vv32–3) with the expression of physical yearning (e.g. v.39). Yet there is no suggestion that Kṛṣṇa himself feels any desire in return. His immediate response is one of detached and amused pity:

> Hearing their despondent words, the master of the masters of yoga gave a kindly laugh, and although his sole pleasure was in himself he nevertheless gave pleasure to the herder women (*iti viklavitam tāsāṃ śrutvā yogeśvareśvarah / prahasya sadayaṃ gopīr ātmārāmo 'py arīramat* // 10.29.42)

The message is clear: Kṛṣṇa has no need himself of the cowherd women in order to experience supreme bliss. He makes love to them simply to confer this bliss upon them. He can withdraw from the situation at any point so as to teach them a lesson, as he does when he disappears in 10.29.48 and 10.30.38. When he reappears it is to tell them that his attitude towards them cannot be explained in terms of ordinary human categories of loving or rejecting love:

> Friends, I do not love even the people who love [me], so that their involvement with me may continue, as a destitute man who had wealth and lost it thinks of it intently and knows nothing else (*nāham tu sakhyo bhajato 'pi jantūn bhajāmy amīṣām anuvṚttivṚttaye / yathādhano labdhadhane vinaṣṣe taccintayānyan nibhṚto na veda* // 10.32.20)[26]

In the *rāsakrīḍā* of 10.33 there is again tremendous sexual excitement on the part of the *gopīs* as each one in that large crowd[27] is granted the experience, 'by Kṛṣṇa the Lord of Yoga' (*yogeśvareṇa kṛṣṇena*, 10.33.3), of dancing in close proximity to her beloved Lord. Most of the advances which are described are on the women's part. When Kṛṣṇa's own actions are related he is immediately detached from them:

> Thus, embracing them, stroking their hands, gazing at them with tender looks, unrestrainedly flirting and laughing without restraint, Ramā's lord took his pleasure with the beauties of the herder settlement, like a child playing with his own reflection … (*evaṃ pariṣvaṇgakarābhimarśasṅigdhekṣaṇoddāmavilāsahāsaiḥ / reme rameśo vrajasundarībhir yathārbhakaḥ svapratibimbavibhramaḥ* …, 10.33.17)

Even though this detachment is stressed, Parīkṣit is perplexed by Śuka's account of Kṛṣṇa's behaviour. He cannot reconcile it with the latter's traditional role of 'having descended in order to establish *dharma*' (*samsthāpanāya dharmasya … avatīrṇo*, 10.33.27): what link can there be between this and making love to other men's wives? Śuka gives him various possible explanations. At the lowest level, a mighty

man (*īśvara*) can risk moral or physical dangers which would overwhelm one who is lacking in such might (vv30–1). Next Śuka suggests that such people need not practise the moral precepts which they teach, whereas an ordinary person should follow their teaching, but not necessarily their actions (vv32–3). Thirdly, if this is true of lesser beings, how much more is it true of the lord (*īśitr*) of all beings: he is far above the ordinary code of right and wrong (vv34–5). But finally Śuka states that the one who dwells in all creatures (including the *gopśs* and their husbands), has assumed this human form and undertaken these erotic activities out of grace, so that attachment to himself may be formed (vv36–7).

In view of this it is not surprising that in 10.39, when Kṛṣṇa eventually leaves VṚndāvana for Mathurā, the *gopīs* are described as vehemently distressed by this separation (*vyathitā bh*Ṛ*śam*, v.13; *virahāturā bh*Ṛ*śam*, v.31), whereas no regret or sorrow is attributed to Kṛṣṇa himself. He never returns to his forest home, but after killing Kaṃsa and establishing himself among the Yādavas in Mathurā, he sends his chief *bhakta* Uddhava to assure the herder community, and especially its womenfolk, of his continuing love for them. Uddhava speaks first with Nanda and Yaśodā, reminding them of Kṛṣṇa's eternal spiritual presence with them and within them, because 'he dwells in the hearts of all beings' (*antarh*Ṛ*di sa bhūtānām āste*, 10.46.36). Then the next day he gives Kṛṣṇa's message to the *gopīs*. Before he delivers it, however, he listens to their lamentations and expressions of love for Kṛṣṇa (10.47.4–21), and praises them for their dedication in placing him above their husbands and families (47.26). Their Lord's message is one of austere comfort: at the deepest level they are united with him, since he is all-pervading (v.29), and they must concentrate on cultivating this sense of purely spiritual union with him (v.32). For this reason Kṛṣṇa is keeping away from them (v.34), so that being deprived of his physical presence may make them more keenly aware of him spiritually. Although the women accept this, their immediate reaction is at an apparently more superficial level, as they ask about Kṛṣṇa's dealings with the women of Mathurā (vv40–l) and whether he still remembers his woodland companions (vv42–3). Yet the *Bhāgavata* regards the *gopīs* as being healed of their torments by their contact with his representative (v.53), and Uddhava praises them once more as the true models for all Kṛṣṇa's followers, in spite of their low birth and uninitiated status (v.58).

The final glimpse of the *gopīs* is in 10.82.40–9, where Nanda and his people meet Kṛṣṇa and his family at Samantapañcaka. Here there appears to be no longer any physical element in the women's devotion. They listen to Kṛṣṇa's words once more (vv42–4), then:

Thus, instructed by Kṛṣṇa's teaching on the Supreme Being, and all coverings of the soul destroyed by repeated recollection of him, the *gopīs* obtained him (*adhyātmaśiksayā gopya evaṃ kṛṣṇena śikṣitāḥ / tadanusmaraṅadhvastajīvakośās tarn adhyagan //* 10.82.48)

Kṛṣṇa and his wives: Besides the *gopīs*, there is another group of women who are important in Kṛṣṇa's story: his wives in Dvārakā. In relation to them also the *Bhāgavata* emphasises the idea that he is above and beyond ordinary feelings. It is true that he is affected by Rukmiṇī's beauty to the extent of being unable to sleep at night (10.53.2), but she is 'none other than Śrī' (*Śriyo mātrāṃ*, 10.52.16), his eternal consort. Moreover, even in Kṛṣṇa's relations with Rukmiṇī there later appears the same didactic streak which was found in his relations with the *gopīs*. In 10.60.20 Kṛṣṇa tells his wife:

Indeed we are without desires and have no longing for women, children or wealth. We find perfect satisfaction in our Self and have nothing to do in either of our dwellings [i.e. the body and the home], being [simply] a light (*udāsīnā vayaṃ nūnaṃ na stryapatyārthakāmukāḥ / ātmalabdhyā 'smahe pūrṅā gehayor jyotir akriyāḥ //*)

This apparently cold speech is intended to remove Rukminī's pride, just as Kṛṣṇa's disappearances in the forest were intended to remove the pride of the *gopīs* (10.29.48; 10.30.37-41). Eventually it elicits from her a confession of faith in Kṛṣṇa (10.60.34–48), for which he commends her (10.60.49–57).

Rukmiṇī is, of course, the first out of 16,008 wives of Kṛṣṇa: eight who are named and 16,000 unnamed women whom he weds at one time after freeing them from the *asura* Naraka. In 10.83.5–43 these named wives all explain to Draupadī how 'the Lord himself' (*bhagavān svayam*, v.7) came to marry them. As they relate these episodes, several of the wives speak of themselves as Kṛṣṇa's devotees. Rukmiṇī prays that 'the feet of Śrīniketa may be [available] for my worship' (*chrīniketacaraṇo 'stu mamārcanāya*, v.8), Jāmbavatī declares herself to be his slave (*aham amusya dāsī*, v.10), and the others speak in turn in the same vein.[28] Lakṣmaṇā, whose story is the only one to be told here in any detail, claims to be speaking for her co-wives when she says:

Indeed it must be by renouncing all attachments and by asceticism that all of us have become the house slaves of him who is contented with his Self (*ātmārāmasya*[29] *tasyemā vayaṃ vai gṚhadāsikāḥ / sarvasanganivṚttyāddhā tapasā ca babhūvima //* v.39)

The 16,000 wives whom Kṛṣṇa won from Naraka tell Draupadī that the dust of Kṛṣṇa's feet is dearer to them than anything else in heaven and earth (v.42).

The life of these queens is a highly fortunate one, since Kṛṣṇa is able to multiply his forms so as to live with each one of them as if she were his only wife. This is reminiscent of the episode in the forest

when Kṛṣṇa multiplied himself in order to take the place of all the cowherd boys and their calves (10.13.18–20), or of the *rāsakrīdā* when he multiplied himself among the *gopīs* (10.33.3). Like those episodes, Kṛṣṇa's life at this stage has a celestial spectator,[30] in this case Nārada. In 10.69.1–70.21 he visits Kṛṣṇa and sees him living 16,000 lives, each in a separate palace with one of the wives that he has won from Naraka. Each wife imagines that she is with the one and only Kṛṣṇa, and he throws himself totally into the whole range of householder roles. Nārada even sees him 'seated in meditation on the one Puruṣa beyond Prakrti' (*dhyāyantam ekam āsīnam puruṣaṃ prakṚteḥ param*, v.30).

Kṛṣṇa tells Nārada that all these lives of his are intended to promote *dharma*:

> O brahmin, I utter *dharma* and practise it and delight in it. I have engaged myself with this world in order to teach it. Do not be distressed, my son (*brahman dharmasya vaktāhaṃ kartā tadanumoditā / tac chikṣayal lokam imam āsthitaḥ putra mā khidaṣ //* 10.69.40)

Thus, as with the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa is regarded as being essentially aloof from his wives (cf. 10.61.3–4). He plays the game of being a *gṚhastha* in order to furnish the world with patterns of righteous living. Even his queens are described as 'wretched with [the thought of] separation' (*virahāturāḥ*, 10.70.1). Although this refers immediately to their anguish at the end of each night when they think of the separation which the coming day will bring, there is also the suggestion of their recognition that they cannot hold or possess their husband. It is no wonder that the concluding chapter of *Bhāgavata* 10 contains a song by Kṛṣṇa's queens which is as full of longing for their absent Lord as any of those sung by the *gopīs* (10.90.15–24)[31].

The friend of brahmins

Although the images of the cosmic child and the divine lover suggest a playful, even anarchic, figure whose desires, and the desires which he awakens in others, may run counter to the established conventions of society, *Bhāgavata* 10 also presents Kṛṣṇa as a staunch supporter of the brāhmaṇical order. As a mature leader in Dvārakā he is often characterised by the epithet *brahmanya* (e.g. 10.52.28; 64.31 — and by *dharmātmā* also here; 80.9; 81.2,15), and his respect for righteous brahmins is stressed (e.g. in his dealings with Rukmiṇī's brahmin messenger in 10.52.28–36, with his brahmin friend in 10.80–1 and Śrutadeva in 10.86).

It is hardly surprising then that two of the Dvārakā episodes which the *Bhāgavata* adds to the earlier accounts of Kṛṣṇa's life should be

concerned with respect for brahmins. The first of these occurs in 10.64. Some of the young Yādava princes find a huge lizard trapped in a dry well and, unable to lift it out, report the matter to Kṛṣṇa (10.64.1–4). Needless to say, 'when he saw it, the Lord who has created the world picked it up easily with his left hand' (… *bhagavān viśvabhāvanaḥ / vikṣyojjahāra vāmena tarn karena sa līlaya //* v.5). The touch of Kṛṣṇa's hand instantly transforms the lizard into a king named NṚga, who explains what has happened to him and praises Kṛṣṇa (vv10–30). This story is found also in *Mbh* 13.69, where, as here, the point is that the property of brahmins should be respected. Nrga was turned into a lizard as the consequence of having presented a brahmin with a cow which was not his to give, since it had strayed into his own herd, unknown to him, from that of another brahmin. After hearing his story, Kṛṣṇa speaks at some length to the people of Dvārakā about the respect which is due to brahmins and their property (10.64.31–44).

The other episode is the story of Kṛṣṇa's brahmin friend, a fellow pupil of Sāndīpani (10.80.39),[32] who is pers uaded by his wife to visit Kṛṣṇa in order to ask him to relieve their poverty. The brahmin goes to Dvārakā, motivated less by the prospect of help than by a desire to see Kṛṣṇa (10.80.12), and takes with him as a present four handfuls of parched rice. He enters one of Kṛṣṇa's many palaces, and receives an overwhelmingly warm welcome from Kṛṣṇa and his queen. No name is given to this consort, but the fact that she is referred to as Śrī in 10.80.25–6 suggests that she is Rukmiṇī. The brahmin is too embarrassed to offer his humble gift of parched rice, but Kṛṣṇa coaxes it out of him, praising in the exact words of *BhG* 9.26 the gift which has been offered to him with devotion (10.81.4). Rukmiṇī also claims a handful of rice for herself, and both she and Kṛṣṇa agree that the brahmin's devotion should be rewarded by great wealth.

No offer of wealth is made, however, and the brahmin goes home next morning still marvelling at Kṛṣṇa's gracious treatment of him (81.14–20), and convinced that the latter has given him nothing because wealth might have lessened his devotion. But as he approaches his home he discovers that it has been transformed into a splendid palace (vv21–3) from which his wife, now 'radiant as a celestial goddess' (*visphurantīṃ devīṃ vaimānikīm iva*, v.27) emerges to greet him. He rejoices with her in their unexpected opulence, but remains devoutly attached to Kṛṣṇa rather than allowing himself to become attached to possessions and pleasures (v.38).

This story, like that of NṚga, presents Kṛṣṇa as a friend of brahmins who upholds the order which they represent. At the same time, it is obvious that what he values in this particular brahmin is his devotion

to himself. The brāhmanical order is to be respected, but the key virtue which it exists to promote is *bhakti*.

This is true of Kṛṣṇa's behaviour in his cowherd days also. The community over which Nanda presides is depicted as holding brahmins in high esteem, in contrast with Kaṃsa, whose āsuric servants undertake to kill 'brahmins, expounders of the Vedas, ascetics, frequent performers of sacrifice and cows yielding milk for oblations (… *brāhmaṇān brahmavādinaḥ / tapasvino yajñaśīlān gāś ca … havirdughāḥ //* 10.4.40).[33] Nanda not only calls upon brahmins to assist with the *saṃskāras* connected with his son's birth (10.5.1–5; 7.4– 5), but he and Yaśodā also have them perform protective rites after the overturning of the cart (10.7.11–17),[34] and he gives them gifts to celebrate Kṛṣṇa's defeat of Kāliya (10.17.17–18). The Govardhana sacrifice is said to be instituted ‘for cows, brahmins and the mountain’ (*gavāṃ brāhmaṇānām adreś ca …*, 10.24.25; cf. 10.24.29,30,38) and brahmins play a greater part in it than they do in *Viṣṇu* 5.10.

In such a community the request which the young Kṛṣṇa respectfully makes through his cowherd friends for food from the VṚndāvana brahmins (10.23.2–8) represents a role reversal, since brahmins are mostly the recipients of food from others. Kṛṣṇa makes it clear from the start that this action is for the benefit of the brahmins' wives rather than that of the brahmins themselves (10.23.2), so when his friends return to him empty-handed, he sends them to these brahmin ladies (vv12–14). This time the request evokes an immediate and enthusiastic response. Not only do the brahmins' wives bring food, but they are reluctant to leave Kṛṣṇa and return to their husbands. As later with the *gopīs*, [35] so now he asks these women to go (10.23.28), and when they protest, he explains that concentrating the mind upon him brings one closer to him than physical contact (v.32). The women return to their husbands, and the story ends with the latter acknowledging the emptiness of all the advantages of their brāhmanical birth and expertise, since their wives have excelled them by showing devotion to Kṛṣṇa (vv37–51).

Thus, although the *Bhāgavata* is at pains to present Kṛṣṇa as *brahmaṇya*, it makes clear that this respect for the brāhmaṇical order is a qualified one. That order is no longer in itself the repository of social and religious values which command absolute respect. Kṛṣṇa alone commands this respect, and the role of the brahmins is to maintain a stable society in which, as at Govardhana, he can be worshipped.

It can be seen that the new episodes which the *Bhāgavata* introduces into Kṛṣṇa's story add significant touches to the portraits given by the

Harivaṃśa and the *Viṣṇu*. At the same time its retelling of the episodes which are already familiar enriches them and deepens their meaning. The three *Kṛṣṇacaritas* will now be compared.

BHĀGAVATA 10 AND THE OTHER *KṚṢṆACARITAS*

Now that all three *Kṛṣṇacaritas* have been considered, their resemblances and differences can be seen more clearly. The resemblances lie mainly at the level of the basic storyline. The differences are to be seen in the interpretations which the three texts put upon the basic story and the perspectives in which they set it. Some of these will be examined, after Kṛṣṇa's relation to the other *avatāras* has been explored, in the two remaining chapters. Others can be considered now.

The *Harivaṃśa's Kṛṣṇacarita* is perhaps the most striking example of original composition within the three texts. The realism with which it describes the herders' life[36] has contributed to the widely held impression that this is simply an artless telling of Kṛṣṇa's life story, but a closer look at the text reveals a more complex picture. An exploration of just a small portion of it, Chapters 68–70 which deal with Akrūra's coming to VṚndāvana, reveals a rich variety of images and themes, and an approach to the subject which is by turns direct and allusive. The poetic yet realistic description of Nandagopa's settlement at nightfall (68.1–13) is balanced against the insightful fantasy of Akrūra's first impression of Kṛṣṇa, armed and adorned as Viṣṇu as he milks his ‘father's’ cows. The homely pathos with which Akrūra describes to Kṛṣṇa the feelings of his parents, bereft of his presence in Mathurā, is combined with an evocation of his past appearance as Varāha (69.17) which is a reminder of his true status. Akrūra's mundane request to Kṛṣṇa to look after his chariot and horses (70.8–9) leads into the splendid vision of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa being worshipped in the *nāga* world as Śeṣa and Viṣṇu. These three chapters alone reflect many of the varied characteristics of the *Harivaṃśa's Kṛṣṇacarita*, down-to-earth but imaginative, full of lively realism and yet having room for vision and fantasy.[37]

Viṣṇu 5's story of Kṛṣṇa moves away somewhat from the *Harivaṃśas* realism. To use Ingalls' word it ‘pietizes’[38] Kṛṣṇa's adventures: by introducing the prayers and eulogies which are one of its chief characteristics, it directs the attention of the hearer/reader away from human events to focus upon Kṛṣṇa's revelation of the Supreme God. Even so, it still contains passages like 5.5.7–23, where

the reactions of Nanda and Yaśodā are recognisably those of Indian villagers.[39]

Although *Viṣṇu* 5 is not directly based upon the *Harivaṃśa's Kṛṣṇacarita*, it follows its main outline. It differs from it in one important respect, however: it does not end on the *Harivaṃśas* triumphal note, but relates the death of Kṛṣṇa after almost all the adult male Yādavas have been killed in a drunken brawl. This difference may be because, unlike the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu* has no connection with the *Mahābhārata*'s account of Kṛṣṇa's death in the *Mausalaparvan*, and therefore felt the need to round off the story for itself.

Bhāgavata 10 bears little or no relation to the realities of pastoral life as portrayed in the *Harivaṃśa*. Kṛṣṇa's life among the cowherds takes on a new aspect here. Nanda is presented as to all intents and purposes a king, able to send for expert brahmins to conduct his son's birth ceremonies (10.5.1–2), to give away 200,000 cows together with jewels and gold cloth (v.3) and to have the services of various bards and musicians (v.5). He is called *vrajeśvara* (10.8.42), and he and the *ksatriya* Vasudeva converse as equals (10.5.22–31), while Devakī and Rohiṇī later address Yaśodā as *vrajeśvari* (10.82.38).

This lack of realism in the *Bhāgavata*'s portrayal of Kṛṣṇa's life is perhaps connected with the emphasis which it places on showing his life as a performance, accompanied by celestial musicians and presented before a celestial audience (10.16.27; 25.31–2; 27.24–5; 33.19; 45.42), so that Kṛṣṇa could almost be said to be 'on stage' throughout Book 10. He has already been compared to an actor in Book 1.[40] This comparison points to the beauty of Kṛṣṇa's appearance as perceived by the *gopīs* (10.21.5,8) and also to the fact that he is in control of his actions and of the impression which they make upon others. He shows to Brahmā his 'performance as a child belonging to a herder family' (*paśupavaṃśaśisutvanāṣyam*, 10.13.61). When he has allowed Akrūra to see his divine form, he withdraws it, 'as an actor [concludes] his performance' (*nato nāṣyam ivātmanaḥ*, 10.41.1). What Kṛṣṇa is performing is an 'imitation of human life' (10.3.31; 70.40; 80.45, cf. 7.10.71). The episode in which Nārada sees Kṛṣṇa living 16,008 lives, one with each of his wives (10.69–70), sums up better than any other this aspect of the *Bhagavata*. Kṛṣṇa is at once the author, producer, stage-manager and entire cast of the great cosmic show. It is all his *māyā*, the power by which he stirs the *guṅas* into creation and produces the universe, which is real insofar as it emanates from himself and yet illusory to those who imagine its reality to be intrinsic to itself and independent of him. It is at once his *līlā*, the game which he plays for sheer pleasure, and his

demonstration of *dharma* for the benefit of the human race (10.69.40).

Although the *Bhāgavata* presents this playful picture of Kṛṣṇa, and makes no attempt at realism, it shows a greater concern to organise its material along logical and chronological lines than do the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*. It takes over the Syamantaka episode from the genealogical chapters where the two earlier texts had left it, and puts it into the context of Kṛṣṇa's marriages which are related in 10.52–9, because this episode explains how Kṛṣṇa came to marry Jāmbavatī (10.56.32) and Satyabhāmā (10.56.44). It also organises its material from the *Mahābhārata* in a way which owes nothing to the two earlier texts. Ignoring the subject of the war in the Govardhana story, where Kṛṣṇa's meeting with Indra in 10.27 is taken up entirely with Indra's submission to him as his *bhakta*, it makes its own links with the *Mahābhārata*, links which have no parallel in the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*. Like the *Harivaṃśa*, it ends Kṛṣṇa's story on a triumphant note (10.90.26–8), yet like the *Viṣṇu* it is aware of the need to complete the story with an account of Kṛṣṇa's death, which it postpones until 11.30.

Finally one must consider the way in which each *Kṛṣṇacarita* has its own particular relationship with the text as a whole. For the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Kṛṣṇacarita* makes up a large part of the total text, and what precedes it forms an introduction to it. Kṛṣṇa's life stands out as the event towards which the whole history of the cosmos has been leading, the goal of the purāṅic genealogies. It also has its more immediate preparation in the events of the Tārakāmaya war, the battle between Viṣṇu and Kālanemi and the descent of the gods on Earth's behalf. Without the *Kṛṣṇacarita* there would seem little point or purpose in the *Harivaṃśa*.

In the *Viṣṇu*, on the other hand, Kṛṣṇa's life seems almost superfluous, interrupting as it does the unfolding of history in Books 4 and 6. Without it, the *Viṣṇu* would seem complete, simply reviewing the Supreme God's dominion over space and time. Yet in introducing the *Kṛṣṇacarita* into its coherent scheme the tradition which shaped the *Viṣṇu* is not just making a random insertion. It presents Kṛṣṇa as being at the very heart of Viṣṇu's cosmos: the 'insignificant aspect' (*aṃśāṃṃa*, 5.1.3,4) who reveals upon the human stage the one 'whose universal power abides in a part of his ten thousand times ten-thousandth part' (*yasyāyutāyutāṃśāṃśe visvaśaktir iyaṃ sthitā*, 1.9.53).

The *Bhāgavata* builds up a picture of the universe which is both contained in the cosmic Kṛṣṇa and yet also contains him. It is contained within him spatially because he is identified with the Cosmic Man (*puruṣa*) who comprises yet transcends the universe, and

temporally because the story opens with his dealings with the Pāṇḍavas in Book 1 and draws towards its close with his death in 11.31. It contains him, because the story in Book 10 is presented as part of the historical process, occurring at the most critical point in that process, the juncture of the *dvāpara-* and the *kaliyuga*. Yet even within Book 10's life story Kṛṣṇa is still presented as the one who contains the universe. He carries inside himself everything that is, so that neither his loving foster-mother (10.7.18–19) nor his enemies (TṚṇāvarta, 10.7.26–7; Kāliya, 10.16.31) can bear his weight. In his mouth the whole of the cosmos is contained, as Yaśodā sees in 10.7.34–7 and 10.8.32–45. Unlike Mārkandeya in 12.9, she is not swallowed up by the child, nor is she aware of the ocean of undifferentiated being which Mārkaṇḍeya sees all around him. But she knows for a moment that the child whom she believes to be her son is 'the all-pervading lord' (*īśvaraḥ … vibhuh*, 10.8.43).

Thus the *Bhāgavata*'s whole structure is designed to suggest that Kṛṣṇa is both within and yet beyond the universe. His story is told at what would seem to be the appropriate point chronologically, immediately before the list of kings of the Kali age in 12.1. Yet he appears in the frame-narrative also, so that the cosmic history which takes up most of the *Bhāgavata* is enclosed within his story. He is indeed:

> He who has neither inside nor outside, neither front nor back; he who is the front and the back, the inside and the outside of the universe; he who is. the universe itself (*na cāntar na bahir yasya na pūrvaṃ nāpi cāparam / pūrvaparaṃ bahiś cāntar jagato yo jagac ca yaḥ* // 10.9.13)

The *Bhāgavata* plays with time and space in a way which is consonant with the playful nature of the God whom it celebrates, and which contrasts sharply with the somewhat static universe of the *Viṣṇu*. It often tells the end of a story before the beginning. For instance, it introduces Kṛṣṇa's death and its effect upon others (not only other individuals, but the whole socio-cosmic order, as the dialogue between Earth and Dharma in 1.16 makes clear) long before it tells the full story of Kṛṣṇa's birth and deeds.[41] For the bards of the *Bhāgavata* know that this is the situation in which their hearers live. From one point of view Kṛṣṇa's life is a thing of the past in this *kaliyuga* which came into the world 'on the very day' (*ahar eva …*, 1.15.36) of his death. From another point of view it is an ever present reality, a story which can be told and retold with unfailing beneficial effects (e.g. 1.2.14–17; 10.52.20). Thus Kṛṣṇa can be seen as past (e.g. 1.16) or as present — or even as future (e.g. 11.4.22)[42].

The *Kṛṣṇacarita* is as essential to the *Bhāgavata* as to the *Harivaṃśa*, not because, as in the case of the latter, it makes up such a very large

part of the total text, but because Book 10 and the *Bhāgavata* as a whole are so surely and subtly linked together. Without Book 10, the hearer/reader would still have a world-view dominated by Kṛṣṇa, would still know a good deal about his life from parts of Book 1 and from Uddhava's summary of it in 3.2–4, and would have his teaching and the account of his death in Book 11. Yet there would be a strange blank at the heart of the *purāṅa* if the brief and general outline of Kṛṣṇa's life contained in the Yādava genealogy of 9.24 led almost directly into Kṛṣṇa's teaching of Uddhava in 11.7– 29. Book 10 is certainly the heart of the *Bhāgavata*, not, as in the *Viṣṇu*, showing Kṛṣṇa in a new perspective, different from that of the text as a whole, but reinforcing the total perspective set in place by the whole text's Kṛṣṇa-shaped cosmology.

Chapter Eight

The Lord's cosmic play

However much the *Bhāgavata* may be focused on Kṛṣṇa, there are passages in it, as in the other texts, where he is presented as being only one among several performers in the *avatāra* drama, so that the question of whether he or Viṣṇu is to be seen as supreme cannot be settled by reference to the *Kṛṣṇacarita* alone, even when seen in the context of the whole text. How does the *Bhāgavata* see his relation to these other performers, and how does it present the purposes of the *avatāras*? This chapter will explore these questions, not only in the *Bhāgavata* but in all three texts. It will be seen that the *Bhāgavata*'s emphasis upon Kṛṣṇa's supremacy rather than Viṣṇu's brings about some changes where the *avatāras*' purposes are concerned.

THE *AVATĀRA* LISTS OF THE *BHĀGAVATAPURĀNA*

The *Bhāgavata* contains five *avatāra* lists in all,[1] each one different from the others: 1.3.6–25; 2.7.1–38; 10.2.40; 10.40.17–22; 11.4.17–22. Apart from some similarity between 10.2.40 and *Viṣṇu* 5.17.10, these lists have no parallels in the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*; they show no close affinity with the *prādurbhāva* list of *Hv* 31 or *Brahmānda* 2.3.73.72–105a/*Vā;yu* 98.71–104 and *Matsya* 47.237–48. The first two lists are considerably longer than anything in the earlier texts. In their length they bear some resemblance to the Pāñcarātra list found in the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā*[2], and suggest that a process of selection, as well as one of accumulation, may have been at work in the development of the *daśāvatāra* list.

1.3.6–25[3]

In spite of the *Viṣṇu*'s interest in cosmography there is no attempt there to connect the *avatāra* idea with either creation or with the cosmic Puruṣa. In the *Bhāgavata*, however, such connections are strongly made. This list occurs in the frame-narrative and is part of the immediate answer to that request from Śaunaka to Sūta which has already been considered (1.1.12–18). First of all, the origin of the forms in the list is explained. They all derive from one already assumed:

> 1 The Lord took the form of the Cosmic Man, produced from *mahat* and the rest [of the *tattvas*] and consisting of sixteen parts, in order to create the world at the beginning. 2 As he lay on the waters, prolonging his yogic sleep, there appeared from the lotus of his lake-like navel Brahmā, the master of world creators. 3 According to the formation of his limbs the extension of the universe is fabricated. That form of the Lord is indeed *sattva* in its purity and might. 4 Those who have unrestricted vision see his wonderful form with its thousand feet, thighs, arms and mouths, its thousand heads, ears and noses, glittering with a thousand crowns, garments and earrings. 5 This is the eternal resting place and origin of the various *avatāras*, and through a tiny share of it gods, animals, men and the rest are created (1 *jagṚhe pauruṣaṃ rūpaṃ bhagavān mahadādibhih/sambhūtaṃ ṣoḍaśakalam ādau lokasisṚkṣayā* // 2 *yasyāmbhasi śayānasya yoganidrāṃ vitanvataḥ / nābhihradāmbujād āsīd brahmā viśvasṚjāṃ patiḥ* // 3 *yasyāvayavasaṃsthānaiḥ kalpito lokavistaraḥ / tad vai bhagavato rūpaṃ viśuddhaṃ sattvam ūrjitam* // 4 *paśyanty ado rūpam adabhracakṣuṣā*[4] *sahasrapādorubhujānanādbhutam / sahasramūrdhaśravaṇākṣināsikaṃ sahasramaulyambarakundalollasat* // 5 *etan nānāvatārāṇāṃ nidhānaṃ bījam avyayam / yasyāṃśāṃśena sṚjyante devatiryaṅnarādayaḥ* // 1.3.1–5)

This passage is obviously reminiscent of the *Puruṣasūkta*. The Cosmic Man from whose sacrifice the universe is said to be created in ṚV 10.90 is here himself a form of the Lord.

The list which follows is the only one in the *Bhāgavata* which numbers most of its members:

1)

The Kumāra creation (*kaumāraṃ sargam*, v.6): This presumably refers to the four mind-born sons of Brahmā: Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra.

2)

The boar (*saukaraṃ vapuḥ*, v.7)

3)

The Ṛṣi*i* creation and the divine Ṛṣi (Ṛṣi*sargaṃ ca devarṣitvam*, v.8): The reference to the exposition of the *tantraṃ sātvatam* here is usually held to point to Nārada.

4)

The Ṛṣ*rsis* Nara and Nārāyaṇa (v.9)

5)

Kapila (v.10)

6)

Atri's offspring (*atrer apatyatvam*, v.11): i.e. Dattātreya

7)

Yajna (v.12): The protector of Svāyambhuva's *manvantara* (cf. 8.1.5–18)

8)

The son of Merudevī and Nābhi (v.13): i.e. Ṛṣabha

9)

PṚthu (*pārthivaṃ vapuḥ*, v.14)

10)

The fish (*rūpam … mātsyam*, v.15): This *avatāra* is not given a number.

11)

The tortoise (*kāmatharūpeṇa*, v.16)

12)

Dhanvantari (v.17)

13)

The fascinating woman (*mohinyā … striyā*, v.17)

14)

The man-lion (v.18)

15)

The dwarf (v.19)

16)

Paraśurāma (v.20): He is not named, but is identified by the reference to his having deprived the earth of its *kṣatriyas* thrice seven times.

17)

The son of Satyavatī and Parāśara (v.21): i.e. Vyāsa

18)

Rāma Dāśarathi (v.22): He is neither numbered nor named, but, like Paraśurāma, he is characterised by one of his feats.

19)

Rāma & 20) **Kṛṣṇa** (v.23)

21)

Buddha (v.24): This is not regarded as a title, but as a proper name. He is 'the son of Ajana, called Buddha' (*buddho nāmnājanasutaḥ*), and is not numbered.

22)

Kalki (v.25): He also is not numbered.

It will be seen that the names in this list span the range of God's activities from creation to destruction. The first three items in it refer to myths connected with Brahmā's creation of living beings and the shaping of the earth to be their home. They are followed by seven figures who are associated with the earliest days of mankind: the Ṛṣi*s* Nara and Nārāyaṇa, three of the earliest teachers (Kapila, Dattātreya and Ṛṣabha); Yajña, who rules over the first *manvantara*; PṚthu, the first king. Only then do the figures more usually found in purāṇic *avatāra* lists appear: e.g. Matsya, Kūrma,[5] Narasiṃha, Vāmana.

At the end the hearer/reader is told that the twenty-two names given above are not to be regarded as a definitive list:

> Incalculable indeed are the descents of Hari, the treasury of goodness, O brahmins! They are like thousands of streams from an inexhaustible lake (*avatārā hy asaṃkhyeyā hareḥ sattvanidher dvijāḥ / yathāvidāsinaḥ kulyāḥ sarasaḥ syuḥ sahasraśaḥ //* 1.3.26)

What matters is not that one should retain an accurate record of each form taken by Hari. Every example of power and wisdom, every divine intervention in the course of the world, is Hari in some form or another. All the venerable figures who bear responsibility for the existence of the cosmos — Ṛṣi*s*, Manus and their sons, gods and progenitors — are portions (*kalāh*) of Hari (v.27).[6] The only name in the list which represents more than this is that of Kṛṣṇa:

> Whereas these are parts and portions of the Cosmic Man, which from age to age bring happiness to the world which is troubled by Indra's enemies, Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself (*ete cāṃśakalāḥ puṃsaḥ kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam / indrārivyākulaṃ lokaṃ mṚḍayanti yuge yuge //* 1.3.28)

With this the thought returns to the theme of 1.3.1–5. The Lord who has taken the form of the Cosmic Man is not rightly to be seen as the twentieth member of a list of twenty-two. The other twenty-one represent various fragments into which this cosmic figure is divided, but Kṛṣṇa is the transcendent personal power which brings it into being and informs the whole cosmos. Devout concentration upon his births leads to release from suffering (1.3.29).

There is a paradox in the Lord's relation to the forms which are enumerated in *Bhāgavata* 1.3.6–25. On the one hand they are his means of interaction with the universe. Through them 'he whose play is not in vain creates, protects and eats the universe' (*sa vā idaṃ viśvam amoghalīlaḥ sṚjaty avaty atti* …, 1.3.36). Yet, as v.36 continues, 'he is not attached to this [universe]' (*na sajjate 'smin*), nor to any of the roles which he plays. The whole cosmic process is simply his theatrical performance (1.3.37), his play (*līlā*). This is an idea which occurs again and again throughout the *Bhāgavata*, not simply in Book 10.

The second list also connects the *avatāras* with creation and with the form of Puruṣa. It comes very early in Śuka's recital to Parīkṣit, in the account of creation which he says was given to Nārada by Brahmā and has its origin in Hari himself. Having described Puruṣa whose form constitutes the universe (2.5.35–6.11), Brahmā goes on to say that all the beings in that universe are no more than different aspects of the Cosmic Man (2.6.12–17). Thus when he wishes to worship this Man he can do so only by collecting together Puruṣa's own limbs to provide the necessary sacrificial materials (2.6.22–8). Brahmā ends his praise of Puruṣa with a great catalogue of all the forms which are contained within this 'primal *avatāra* of the Supreme' (*ādyo 'vatāraḥ … parasya*, 2.6.41), and urges Nārada to:

> Drink in, O seer, what are regarded as the great Cosmic Man's principal play-appearances, these beautiful accounts which remove the impurities of the ears and which I shall enumerate (*prādhānyato yān Ṛṣa āmananti līlāvatārān puruṣasya bhūmnaḥ / āpīyatāṃ karṇakaṣāya śoṣān anukramiṣye ta imān supeśān* // 2.6.45)

This leads into the list of 2.7.1–38, in which Brahmā recounts the forms which have emerged from Puruṣa's primordial revelation. Yet it is not so much a list of forms as a list of episodes in which the Lord has appeared in the world in order to rescue or benefit some person or group within it, sometimes appearing as his own four-armed self, with his characteristic weapons and ornaments, rather than adopting any special form.[7] The episodes which are included are as follows:

(v.1)	Varāha's raising of the earth;
(v.2)	Suyajna's removal of the world's distress;
(v.3)	Kapila's enlightenment of his mother;
(v.4)	Dattātreya's teaching of the Yādavas and Haihayas;
(v.5)	the teaching on self-realisation of the four Sana-s (*catuḥsano*);[8]
(vv6–7)	the triumph of Nara and Nārāyaṇa over Kāma;
(v.8)	Dhruva's acquisition of an ';immovable position'; (*dhruvagatim*);
(v.9)	Prthu's saving of his father Vena and milking of the Earth;
(v.10)	Ṛṣabha's achievement of self-realisation;
(v.11)	Hayaśiras' embodiment of the

	power of the sacrifice;
(v.12)	Matsya's rescue of the Vedas and of all living beings;
(v.13)	Kurma's support of the churning-stick when the *devas* and the *asuras* churned the sea of milk;
(v.14)	Narasimha's destruction of Hiranyakaśipu;
(vv15–16)	Hari's rescue of the elephant king;
(vv17–18)	Vāmana's recovery of the Earth from Bali;[9]
(v.19)	the Lord's teaching of Nārada;
(v.20)	the rule of the presiding god in each *manvantara*;
(v.21)	Dhanvantari's healing activities;[10]
(v.22)	Paraśurāma's extirpation of the *kṣatriyas*;
(vv23–5)	Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa;
(vv26ņ35)	Kṛṣṇa's heroic deeds, mainly his killing of *asuras*;[11]
(v.36)	Vyāsa's division of the Veda into different branches;
(v.37)	the Lord's assumption of the form of a heretic in order to defeat the *asuras*;[12]
(v.38)	the Lord's punishment of Kali at the end of the *yuga*.

Like 1.3.6–25, this list is followed by comments which relate it to the wider issues of creation, maintenance and destruction. In this case the next verse could be taken either as a summary of the episodes which have just been enumerated, allocating each of them to a phase of the Lord's activity, or it could be taken as indicating that he is not in fact confined to these revelatory episodes but is to be seen in all beings:

> In creation: *tapas*, myself and the nine Ṛṣi*s* who are progenitors;[13] in maintenance: *dharma*, sacrifice, Manu, gods and lords of the earth; at the end: *adharma*, Hara, *asuras* and others who are subject to anger; these are the deceiving powers of the possessor of abundant energies *(sarge tapo 'ham* Ṛṣayo *nava ye prajeśāḥ sthāne ca dharmamakhamanvamarāvanīśāḥ / ante tv adharma*ṃ *haramanyuvaśāsurādyā māyāvibhūtaya imāḥ puruśaktibhājaḥ* // 2.7.39)

This leads into the praise of the Lord in v.40, in words which echo the opening of the *Viṣṇusūkta* (*RV* 1.154.1), and in v.41 to the acknowledgement of how difficult it is to understand the Cosmic Man's power to create deceptive forms. In spite of this difficulty,

Brahmā gives a fairly long list of those who can understand this *māyā* through the Lord's grace towards them (vv42–6). This Lord, who is *brahman* (v.47), is 'the all-pervading Lord of blessings' (… *śreyasām api vibhur bhagavān* …, v.49). Thus everything is Hari (v.50).

10.2.40

This verse is the culmination of a hymn of praise which the gods sing to Kṛṣṇa while he is in his mother's womb (10.2.26–40). Such a hymn is not entirely without precedent in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*. *Hv* 48.17 mentions praise of the newly born Kṛṣṇa by Ṛṣi*s, gandharvas* and *apsaras*-es, while *Viṣṇu* 5.2.7–21 is the gods' hymn to the pregnant Devakī. But only the *Bhāgavata* presents the gods as praising Kṛṣṇa in the womb:

> You have appeared as fish, horse, tortoise, man-lion, boar, gander, *kṣatriya*, brahmin and god. As you protect us now, Lord, and the three worlds, remove the burden of the earth. Praise to you, O greatest of the Yadus (*matsyāśvakacchapanṚsiṃhavarāhahaṃsarājanyaviprabudheṣu kṚtāvatāraḥ / tvaṃ pāsi nas tribhuvanaṃ ca yathādhuneśa bhāraṃ bhuvo hara yadūttama vandanaṃ te* // 10.2.40)

Like *Viṣṇu* 5.17.10, this list has a preponderance of theriomorphic figures (fish, horse, tortoise, man-lion, boar, gander). Even the 'human' figures are representatives of their kind (*kṣatriya*, brahmin and god)[14] rather than particular individuals.

10.40.17–22

After Akrūra's vision in the Yamunā of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in the form of Nārāyaṇa and Śeṣa, he includes a list of the Lord's forms in his praise of 'Nārāyaṇa the eternal primordial Puruṣa' (*nārāyaṇaṃ puruṣam ādyam avyayam*, 10.40.1). In the *Harivaṃśa*'s version of the story Akrūra wishes to speak, but is paralysed by Kṛṣṇa's power (*Hv* 70.28). In *Viṣṇu* 5.18.48–58 Akrūra praises the Supreme Spirit who presents himself in the universe in various forms, but there is no sort of *avatāra* list. Only in the *Bhāgavata* does such a list occur:

> 16 Whatever forms you adopt for your amusement here, the worlds joyfully sing your fame because they remove sorrows. 17 Glory to the primal fish, moving in the ocean of the dissolution. Glory to you, Hayaśīrṣan, who were the death of Madhu and Kaiṣabha. 18 Glory to the great tortoise, the support of Mandara. Glory to the boar form, raising up the earth in play. 19 O remover of the fear of righteous people, glory to you, marvellous lion. Glory to you, dwarf, stepping over the three worlds. 20 Glory to the leader of the BhṚgus, cutting down the forest of arrogant *kṣatriyas*. Glory to the noblest of Raghus, the destroyer of Rāvaṇa. 21 Glory to Vāsudeva and glory to Saṃkarṣaṇa, to Pradyumna and Aniruddha, glory to the leader of the Sātvatas. 22 Glory to the Buddha, the pure deceiver of the Daityas and Dānavas. Glory to you in the form of Kalki, destroyer of the *kṣatriya* class which consists mostly of barbarians (16 *yāni yānīha rūpāni krīḍanārthaṃ bibharṣi hi / tair āmṚṣṣaśuco lokā mudā gāyanti te yaśah* // 17 *namaḥ kāraṇamatsyāya pralayābdhicarāya ca / hayaśīrṣṇe namas tubhyaṃ madhukaiṣabhamṚtyave* // 18

akūpārāya bṚhate namo mandaradhāriṇe / kṣityuddhāravihārāya namaḥ sūkaramūrtaye // 19 *namas te 'dbhutasiṃhāya sādhulokabhayāpaha / vāmanāya namas tubhyaṃ krāntatribhuvanāya ca //* 20 *namo bhṚgūnāṃ pataye dṚptakṣatravanacchide / namas te raghuvaryāya rāvaṇāntakarāya ca //* 21 *namas te vāsudevāya namah saṃkarṣanāya ca / pradyumnāyāniruddhāya sātvatāṃ pataye namaḥ //* 22 *namo buddhāya śuddhāya daityadānavamohine / mlecchaprāyakṣatrahantre namas te kalkirūpiṇe //* 10.40.16–22)

This list bears some resemblance to the standard *daśāvatāra* sequence, although the inclusion of Hayaśīrṣan between Matsya and Kūrma (or Akupāra here) means that there are eleven members of this series, and v.21 lengthens it still further by praising Kṛṣṇa (or Vāsudeva) in his four *vyūha* forms. For the composer of the *Bhāgavata*, however, this resemblance was probably of no particular significance. What mattered more to him was that this list should identify 'Nārāyaṇa the eternal primordial Puruṣa' with Kṛṣṇa, and thus help to establish the idea that he is different from the other *avatāras* in the list because he is one with their source; indeed, he is even the source of their source, according to 1.3.1, where he as the Lord is said to assume the form of Puruṣa. Thus the name Kṛṣṇa is not used in this list, but instead the four *vyūha* names are included.[15]

The immediate sequel to Akrūra's praises, in 10.41.1, shows that it is Kṛṣṇa who is in control of the vision which has been seen:

> While [Akrūra] was praising him, Lord Kṛṣṇa withdrew again the form which he had manifested in the water, as an actor [concludes] his performance (*stuvatas tasya bhagavān darśayitvā jale vapuḥ / bhūyaḥ samāharat kṛṣṇo naṣo nāṣyam ivātmanaḥ //* 10.41.1)

He, rather than Nārāyaṇa or Puruṣa, is the primal reality behind all the forms: indeed Nārāyaṇa, Puruṣa and the *vyūhas*, along with the *avatāras* of vv17–20,22, are simply other forms of the Lord Kṛṣṇa.

11.4.17–22

This is part of the instruction which the nine sons of Ṛṣabha once gave to King Nimi of Videha, and which Nārada relates to Vasudeva in 11.2–5. It has no parallels whatsoever in either the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu*, although the *Bhāgavata* is presumably drawing upon traditional material here. Drumila begins by stating the impossibility of describing the Lord (11.4.2), then tells Nimi of the evolution of the universe from 'Nārāyaṇa the primordial deity' (*nārāyaṇa ādidevaḥ*), who created it and entered into it and so came to be called Puruṣa (v.3). Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra are the forms which he assumes for creation, maintenance and destruction (v.5). He becomes the Ṛṣi*s* Nara and Nārāyaṇa and humbles the pride of Indra by showing himself to be above Kāma's attacks and revealing his true identity to the gods who do him homage (vv6–16).[16] Then other forms are enumerated in which 'Viṣṇu manifested an aspect of himself by

descending for the good of the worlds' (*viṣṇuḥ śivāya jagatāṃ kalayāvatīrnas*, v.17):

(v.17)	**Haṃsa; Datta;** (Sanat-)**Kumāra; Ṛṣabha; Hayāsya;**
(v.18)	**Matsya; Varāha** (*krauḍe*); **Kūrma; The rescuer of the elephant king;**
(v.19)	**The rescuer of the thumb-sized sages; Indra's absolver; the rescuer of the celestial women** (*devastrīyo*);[17] **Narasimha;**
(v.20)	**The gods' champions against the** *asuras* **in various** *manvantaras*; **Vāmana;**
(v.21)	**Paraśurāma** (Rāma Bhārgavāgni); **Rāma Dāśarathi** (Sītāpati);
(v.22)	**Kṛṣṇa; Buddha; Kalki**

As in 2.7.1–38, the emphasis appears to be on particular deeds rather than on particular persons. As Hayāsya Viṣṇu killed Madhu and recovered the Vedas; as Matsya he protected Manu; as the Boar he killed Diti's son and raised up the earth; as Kūrma he supported the mountain on his back during the churning of the ocean; he rescued the elephant king from the crocodile; he rescued the sages; he released Indra from his brahmanicide in killing VṚtra; he set free the *apsaras*-es imprisoned in the *asura's* (i.e. Naraka's) house; as NṚsiṃha he killed the *asura* king; in various forms (*kalābhiḥ*) he killed the *asuras* and established the worlds; as Vāmana he took away the earth from Bali. In all these instances the name of the *avatāra* (if it is mentioned) is in the locative — sometimes it is the locative of the adjectival form (e.g. *mātsye, kaurme)* — as if to ensure that the true subject of the sentence is understood as the Lord in all the various forms which he assumes. With Rāma Bhārgavāgni and Sītāpati, however, the names become nominative, subjects of verbs in their own right, while Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalki are not named at all, although their future activities are described in v.22. Like 1.3.6–25 and 2.7.1–38, this list is followed by a statement that 'the deeds and lives of the lord of the world' (*karmāṇi janmāni ca jagatpateḥ*) are innumerable (11.4.23).

It is clear that these five *avatāra* lists are intended to be a significant part of the *Bhāgavata*'s cosmic history. They are signs of the Lord's active concern for his universe, pouring out from his inexhaustible plenitude of being (1.3.26). There is one *avatāra* figure, however, which the *Bhāgavata* regards as containing all this plenitude within itself. This is, of course, Kṛṣṇa. The language of 'descent', which the

Bhāgavata uses about him, has almost lost its literal meaning. It is no longer a question of God 'descending' from elsewhere, but of a more intense focusing of his omnipresent being in special situations, so that *avatāra* may be just as appropriately translated by 'appearance' as by 'descent'. The metaphors in which the *Bhāgavata* expresses the *avatāra* theme are of a plant growing from a seed (1.3.5; 3.9.2) or of innumerable streams flowing from a reservoir (1.3.26). Kṛṣṇa has no need of any celestial point of reference from which to descend. He is himself the reservoir from which all *avatāra* forms flow; the whole universe is contained within him.

Although Kṛṣṇa is everything in the *Bhāgavata*, the other figures in the *avatāra* sequences play prominent parts in its cosmic history. The *avatāra* myth here is not, as in the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Brahmānda/ Vāyu*, a self-contained theme which can be dealt with in one particular context with its own perspective. Its context is that of the whole sweep of the *Bhāgavata*, and its position is central. This is particularly true of the *avatāra* lists of 1.3.6–25 and 2.7.1–38, which are an important part of the *Bhāgavata*'s description of how the universe is and how God operates within it. It may seem surprising that there should be two such lists and not one. Yet to have included only the first list might have given the impression that the *avatāras* were relevant only to the frame-narrative, whereas the second advances them to a more central position in the *purāṇa* as a whole, since it is part of Brahmā's revelation to Nārada from the knowledge which he himself has acquired from the Supreme God (cf. 2.4.25).

The *avatāra* list of 2.7.1–38 functions almost as a table of contents for the whole *purāṇa*, since it corresponds much more closely than 1.3.6–25 to the actual stories which the *Bhāgavata* selects for full-scale treatment. Dhruva and the elephant king's rescuer are thus included here, presumably because their stories are narrated in the text as impressive illustrations of the Lord's gracious interventions on behalf of his devotees, even though their precise status as *avatāra* stories in the usual sense may be doubtful. The order of the names in this list is not entirely the same as the order of the stories, but the details given here correspond to those given in them.[18] Thus 2.7.1–38 may perhaps be regarded as the most important *avatāra* list in the whole *purāṇa*.

None of the five *avatāra* lists which the *Bhāgavata* contains is the standard *daśāvatāra* sequence. Yet there are at least two references to *avatāras* which suggest that such a list of ten, beginning with Matsya, may have been known to the *Bhāgavata*.[19] Perhaps its composers were reluctant to use the standard *avatāra* list of ten because it appeared to be too limiting — not so much too short as too rigid and too likely to give the impression of attempting to speak definitively of the

undefinable.

THE PURPOSE OF THE *AVATĀRAS*

From its first known instances, the *avatāra* myth is connected with the idea of purpose. Not every transformation of a divine figure is regarded as an *avatāra*, but only those which take place with certain ends in view. In the *Mahābhārata* these ends are somewhat differently expressed in the two contexts in which they appear. In *BhG* 4.7–8, and related passages, the *avatāra* descends in order to restore *dharma* and punish *adharma*, while in 1.54–61 his concern is with the removal of the earth's burden.

In the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* there is no discussion as to the purpose of the *avatāras*. There is a passage near the beginning of the *Bhāgavata*, however, in which a variety of possible explanations is set out, perhaps reflecting the kind of discussion which took place in the circles which produced this *purāna*. After Kṛṣṇa has restored Uttarā's unborn baby to life, Kuntī marvels at the fact that he who as *viśvātman* is without birth or action nevertheless is born and performs actions as animal, man, *Ṛṣi* or sea-creature (1.8.30). She goes on to say that various reasons are given for his appearance in his present form:

> 32 Some say that, although without birth, you were born in dear Yadu's race for the sake of Yudhiṣṭhira's fame, as the sandalwood tree [grows] for the sake of Mt Malaya's. 33 Others [say] that, although without birth, you were born from Vasudeva and Devakī at their entreaty, for the safety of the world and the slaughter of the gods' enemies. 34 Others [say] that, at Brahmā's request, you were born to remove the burden of the earth, which was like a boat on the ocean, sinking under its heavy load. 35 Some [say] that [it is] to perform [deeds] worthy of hearing and remembrance by those who in this life are afflicted by ignorance, desire and [past] actions (32 *kecid āhur ajaṃ jātaṃ puṇyaślokasya kīrtaye / yadoḥ priyasyānvavāye malayasyeva candanam //* 33 *apare vasudevasya devakyāṃ yācito 'bhyagāt / ajas tvam asya kṣemāya vadhāya ca suradviṣām //* 34 *bhārāvatāraṇāyānye bhuvo nāva ivodadhau / sīdantyā bhūribhāreṇa jāto hy ātmabhuvārthitah //* 35 *bhave 'smin kliśyamānānām avidyākāmakarmabhiḥ / śravaṇasmaraṇārhāṇi kariṣyann iti kecana //* 1.8.32–5)

Each verse appears to represent a deeper level of understanding. For some, Kṛṣṇa is simply a hero whose deeds increase the fame of his race and his associates (v.32). For others, his heroic deeds have a stronger mythological significance: they are intended to benefit the world and to destroy the enemies with whom the gods are in perpetual conflict (v.33). Others again see his acts as rescuing the earth from the burden which is destroying it (v.34). Finally, there are those for whom Kṛṣṇa's story is something to be heard and reflected upon with a view to lessening the suffering caused by one's ignorance, desires and actions.[20]

There are two possibilities which Kuntī does not mention. One is the

Gītā's theme of the restoration of *dharma* and the punishment of *adharma*. The other is the one which is brought out more strongly by the *Bhāgavata* than by either of the earlier texts. This is the idea that God needs to have no purpose in manifesting himself as an *avatāra* beyond that of his own spontaneous enjoyment, his *līlā*. If these are added to Kuntī's suggestions, they give six angles from which the purpose of the *avatāras* may be viewed. Some of them are so closely linked to one another that they are not easy to keep apart, but for the purpose of examining them they may be separated out as follows:

i)
the protection of *dharma* and the punishment of *adharma*;

ii)
the removal of the earth's burden;

iii)
the welfare of the universe;

iv)
the destruction of *asuras*;

v)
the provision of the means of liberation;

vi)
spontaneous enjoyment (*līlā*).

i) The protection of *dharma* and the punishment of *adharma*

One might expect that *BhG* 4.7–8 would echo and re-echo throughout all three texts. Yet in fact the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* contain scarcely any trace of it. There is a reference in *Viṣṇu* 5.1.50 to Viṣṇu's taking a body 'for the protection of *dharma*' (*dharmatrānāya*), but no more than that. It is even possible that whoever was responsible for the presence of Book 5 in the *Viṣṇu* deliberately chose to ignore an echo of *BhG* 4.7–8. The *Brahma's Kṛṣṇacarita* begins thus:

> 1 Listen, O leading sages! I shall relate to you concisely Hari's descent, and how it was through his desire to remove the burden here. 2 For whenever there is an increase in *adharma*, O brahmins, and *dharma* is becoming scarce, then the Lord Janārdana 3 divides his body in two and makes his descent here, to protect the righteous and to establish *dharma*. 4 To punish the evildoers and the other enemies of the gods, and to protect his subjects, he is born from age to age (1 *śṚṇudhvaṃ muniśārdulāḥ pravakṣyāmi samāsataḥ / avatāraṃ hareś cātra bhārāvataraṇecchayā // 2 yadā yadā tv adharmasya vṚddhir bhavati bho dvijāḥ / dharmaś ca hrāsam abhyeti tadā devo janārdanaḥ // 3 avatāraṃ karoty atra dvidhā kṚtvā 'tmanas tanum / sādhūnāṃ rakṣaṇārthāya dharmasaṃsthāpanāya ca // 4 duṣṣānāṃ nigrahārthāya anyeṣāṃ ca suradviṣām / prajānāṃ rakṣaṇārthāya jāyate 'sau yuge yuge // Brahma* 181.1–4)

This passage is not found in *Viṣṇu* 5, which has a different opening to Kṛṣṇa's story. It may well be that both the *Viṣṇu* and the *Brahma* found Kṛṣṇa's story without any introduction and each added its own. If the *Viṣṇu* did in fact know *Brahma* 181.1–4, its omission would seem like a deliberate rejection of the ideas of BhG 4.7–8. Even if no deliberate rejection were involved, *BhG* 4.7–8 was clearly not in the compilers' minds.

There is nothing in the *Bhāgavata* quite as close to *BhG* 4.7–8 as *Brahma* 181.1–4, but there are several verses which contain echoes of the *Gītā*'s *yadā yadā* and *yuge yuge*. For instance, when Sūta's tracing of the dynasty of Yadu arrives at Kṛṣṇa he says:

> Whenever *dharma* is in decline and evil is increasing, then Lord Hari, the ruler of selves, is born (*yadā yadeha dharmasya kṣayo vṚddhiś ca pāpmanah / tadā tu bhagavān īśa ātmānaṃ sṚjate hariḥ* // 9.24.56)

In 1.10.25, the general vocabulary is unlike that of *BhG* 4.7–8, but the opening *yadā* and the closing *yuge yuge* nevertheless remind the hearer/reader of the earlier passage.[21]

The task of protecting *dharma* and punishing *adharma* is not always described within the *yadā yadā … yuge yuge* framework, nor is it regarded as belonging solely to the human Kṛṣṇa, who himself says:

> I am preparing another body for the protection of *dharma* and for putting an end to *adharma* at whatever time it may prevail (*anyo 'pi dharmarakṣāyai dehaḥ saṃbhriyate mayā / virāmāyāpy adharmasya kāle prabhavataḥ kvacit* // 10.50.10)

This would appear to point to Kalki,[22] of whom it is also said near the end of the *Bhāgavata*:

> 16 Thus when the Kali age is almost over, and people are subject to harsh conditions, the Lord will descend to rescue *dharma* by his *sattva*. 17 The birth of Viṣṇu, the master of the moving and the motionless, the Ruler and Self of all, [is] for the rescue of *dharma* and the expiation of the past actions of the righteous (16 *itthaṃ kalau gataprāye jane tu kharadharmiṇi / dharmatrāṇāya sattvena bhagavān avatariṣyati* // 17 *carācaraguror viṣṇor īśvarasyākhilātmanaḥ / dharmatrāṇāya sādhūnāṃ janma karmāpanuttaye* // 12.2.16–17)

In the episode of Jaya and Vijaya, the Lord of Vaikuṇṣha is addressed by Sanatkumāra, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanātana in similar terms: Tor from you [proceeds] the eternal *dharma*. It is protected by your forms' (*tvattvaḥ sanātano dharmo rakṣyate tanubhis tava*, 3.16.18). This again suggests that the protection *of dharma* is the task of all the *avatāras*.

ii) The removal of the earth's burden

This theme is closely connected with that of the descent of the gods, since in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* it is expressly stated that it is the

purpose of their descent (cf. *Hv* 41.27; *Viṣṇu* 5.1.27,28,56). *Hv* 41 describes this burden in terms of kings and their armies, waging war upon each other:

> 17 The earth is oppressed by those kings, blazing with glory, powerful through their armies, pursuing one another. 18 Worn out by her burden and oppressed by the kings, the earth is entirely covered, like a shipwrecked boat (17 *teṣāṃ jvalitakīrtīnām anyonyam anuvartinām / rājñāṃ balair balavatāṃ pīḍyate vasudhātalam* // 18 *seyaṃ bhāraparisrāntā pīḍyamānā narādhipaiḥ / pṚthivī samanuprāptā naur ivāsannaviplavā* // 41.17–18)

Not only do these armies cover the earth with battles, but the numbers of their soldiers are in themselves a burden to the earth (41.21–2). Although in *Hv* 44.61–78 Nārada reveals that the threat comes from the *asuras* who have descended upon it, the idea that human armies are a burden to the earth persists, so that in 81.12–13 Kṛṣṇa tells his brother that in destroying Jarāsaṃdha's army they will be relieving the earth of its load.

In the *Viṣṇu* the burden is rarely described, or even precisely specified, although in 5.1.25–6 Earth tells Brahmā that she is overrun by āsuric warriors. For the most part, however, it is simply taken for granted that the removal of Earth's burden is Kṛṣṇa's purpose in coming into the world. This fits in with the *Viṣṇu*'s tendency to play down the *devāsura* conflict and to minimise references to Viṣṇu as a divine hero engaged in warfare against the *asuras*. It is in the *Viṣṇu* that this purpose is most exclusively attached to Kṛṣṇa and those associated with him, whereas both the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Bhāgavata* say that this is the purpose of Rāma Jāmadagnya also (*Hv* 42.39; *Bhāgavata* 9.16.27). Rāma's story is not told in the *Viṣṇu*, possibly in order to avoid using words about him which this *purāṇa* regards as being suitable for Kṛṣṇa alone.

The *Bhāgavata* has another reference which appears to be relevant here. In its second *avatāra* list (2.7.1–38) it speaks of Suyajña, son of Ruci and Ākutī: ‘because he removed the great distress of the triple world, Svāyambhuva Manu called him Han’ (*lokatrayasya mahatīm aharad y ad ārtiṃ svāyaṃbhuvena manunā harir ity anūktaḥ*, 2.7.2b). The verb √*hṛ* is used elsewhere with *bhāra* in the *Bhāgavata* (e.g. of Kṛṣṇa and his brother Rāma in 1.3.23, and of Kṛṣṇa alone in 1.7.25, 1.15.34, 10.50.9), so it is likely that ‘the great distress of the triple world’ is understood as referring to Earth's burden.

As in the *Harivaṃśa*, the burden which the *Bhāgavata* sees as having to be removed is the load of warriors who pound the earth's surface. This is what the cow Earth complains of in the conversation with the bull Dharma which is overheard by Parīkṣit (1.16.18–37).[23] Yet at the same time there are passages where the harsh military images are softened, for instance, in this conversation between Earth and

Dharma, the former remembers how she has been adorned by Kṛṣṇa's footprints (1.16.33; cf. 1.17.26), and the beautiful form which he adopted when he rid the earth of the hundred *akṣauhiṇīs*[24] of the *asura* kings (1.16.33–5).[25] Even more of a softening is found in 3.2.18 where Uddhava speaks to Vidura in the language of an emotional *bhakta* rather than that of the follower of a warrior-leader:

> Having smelt the dust of the Lord's lotus-feet, what man could forget it? It is he who removed the earth's burden by a twitch of his creeper-like eyebrow, [which has the power of] Yama (*ko vā amuṣyāṅghrisarojareṇuṃ vismartum iśīta pumān vijighran / yo visphuradbhrūviṣapena bhūmer bhāraṃ kṛtāntena tiraścakāra //* 3.2.18)

This is in keeping with the emphasis on *bhakti* which was noted on pages 131–2 in connection with some of the episodes in Kṛṣṇa's life in Dvārakā.

iii) The welfare of the universe

All three texts agree that God manifests himself for the sake of the universe. In the *Viṣṇu* this is stated only in the most general terms. It is 'in order to maintain the world' (*jagataḥ sthityartham*, 4.4.87; cf.1.4.9; 5.17.10); 'for the world's benefit' (*jagato hitam*, 5.1.4); 'for the sake of the earth' (*jagaty arthe*, 5.1.32; 5.17.12). Such general terms are used in the *Harivaṃśa* also, particularly in *Hv* 31, where Viṣṇu's *prādurbhāvas* are described. But sometimes the *Harivaṃśa* is more specific, as in its general statement in 31.18 that Viṣṇu's manifestations are 'for the welfare of gods and men, and the existence of the worlds' (*hitārthaṃ suramartyānāṃ lokānāṃ prabhavāya ca*, 31.13a).[26] '*Prabhavāya*' could also mean 'for creation', so that it is fitting that the first glimpse of Viṣṇu's beneficial activity which *Hv* 31 gives is a picture of the Boar, recreating the earth which has been submerged beneath the cosmic ocean (31.29–30). The asceticism of Rāma Jāmadagnya (31.108) is also said to benefit the world.

In the *Bhāgavata* the Supreme God's care for the universe is strongly expressed. In the *daśalakṣaṇa* lists it appears as *poṣaṇa* in 2.10.1 and as *rakṣā* in 12.7.9; indeed *rakṣā* is explicitly connected with the *avatāras* in 12.7.14:

> The protection of the universe means the activity of Acyuta's *avatāras* from age to age, among animals, men, Ṛṣ*i*s and gods, by which the enemies of the Vedas are killed (*rakṣācyutāvatāreha viśvasyānu yuge yuge / tiryaṅmartyarṣideveṣu hanyante yais trayīdviṣaḥ //*)

Posana emphasises the notion of fostering or nourishing, while *rakṣā* stresses the idea of protecting or preserving, but both are obviously close together in meaning. The welfare of the universe is the very first purpose which the *Bhāgavata* ascribes to Kṛṣṇa as *avatāra*:

> Please describe to us, who desire to hear, him whose descent is for the peace and welfare of [all] beings (*tan naḥ śuśrūṣamānānām arhasy arigānuvarṇitum / yasyāvatāro bhūtānāṃ kṣemāya ca bhavāya ca* // 1.1.13)

When Uddhava is reflecting upon his Lord's life story, in conversation with Vidura, he explains the reason for Kṛṣṇa's birth: 'the Lord [was] wishing to bring happiness to the earth' (*cikīrṣur bhagavān asyāḥ śam* …, 3.2.25).

The protection of the world may be ascribed to others besides Kṛṣṇa. When Śuka is describing Bharata's dynasty he says of Gaya:

> Possessing a portion of the Lord Viṣṇu in person, who had taken a sāttvic form in order to protect the universe, he achieved the status of a *mahāpuruṣa* because he bore the original signs (… *sākṣād bhagavato viṣṇor jagad rirakṣiṣayā gṚhītasattvasya kalātmavat tv ādilakṣaṇena mahāpuruṣatāṃ prāptaḥ* // 5.15.6)

In 11.4.17 several forms are mentioned (Haṃsa; Dattātreya; Sanatkumāra; Ṛṣabha; Hayāsya) in which 'Viṣṇu manifested an aspect of himself by descending for the good of the worlds' (*viṣṇuḥ śivāya jagatāṃ kalayāvatīrṇas*).

Sometimes in the *Bhāgavata* 'the world's good' is spelt out in greater detail, so that the *avatāra* is said to come for the sake of brahmins, cows and gods, a phrase which calls to mind Book 10's emphasis upon Kṛṣṇa's *brahmanya* qualities. Thus after considering the possible reasons for Kṛṣṇa's appearance on earth Kuntī says to him:

> Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna's friend, the best of the Vṛṣṇis, destroyer of the dynasties of kings who harrass the earth, of endless might! Govinda, you have appeared to remove the afflictions of cows, brahmins and gods, O lord of yoga, universal teacher, Lord, glory to you (*śrīkṛṣṇa kṛṣṇasakha vṛṣṇyṚṣabhāvanidhrugrājanyavaṃśadahanānapavargavīrya / govinda godvijasurārtiharāvatāra yogeśvarākhilaguro bhagavan namaste* // 1.8.43)

In asking Maitreya to tell him of the deeds of the Lord, Vidura makes a similar reference: 'He performs deeds in fun for the benefit of brahmins, cows and gods in his various *avatāras*' (*krīḍan vidhatte dvijagosurāṇāṃ kṣemāya karmāṇy avatārabhedaiḥ* / 3.5.7a). And in introducing the story of Matsya, Śuka describes the purpose of the *avatāras* in these terms:

> When the Lord wishes to protect cows, brahmins, the righteous and the Vedas, *dharma* and *artha*, he assumes bodies (*goviprasurasādhūnāṃ chandasām api ceśvaraḥ / rakṣām icchaṃs tanūr dhatte dharmasyārthasya caiva hi* // 8.24.5)

iv) The destruction of asuras

Kuntī brings together 'the safety of the earth' and 'the slaughter of the gods' enemies' in *Bhāgavata* 1.8.33. This could be translated as 'the slaughter of the *asuras*', since these are the enemies of the gods par excellence.[27] The power for which they struggle is primarily the

power which lies in the sacrifice, though it is sometimes defined more narrowly as *soma* or *amṚta*, the drink which confers immortality, or as sovereignty over the *trailokya*.[28]

Although the *Harivaṃśa* contains no general statement to the effect that the *avatāras* (or *prādhurbhāvas*) come in order to destroy *asuras*, the conflict between them and the *devas* is strongly present throughout it. In Chapter 31, one of the purposes of Rāma Dāśarathi's life is said to be 'the destruction of the *rākśasas*' (31.112) and the stories of Pauskaraka, Narasimha and Vāmana culminate in the death or defeat of an *asura*.[29] Viṣṇu himself is the gods' champion against Kālanemi in the Tārakāmaya war between *devas* and *asuras* (*Hv* 32–8), while Kṛṣṇa's defeat of Kaṃsa and his āsuric henchmen is told at length. *Hv* 91.21 goes so far as to say that the killing of Naraka is the reason for Kṛṣṇa's birth. In the *Viṣṇu* the more violent aspects of the *devāsura* conflict are not much in evidence. A minor recipient of his power like Purañjaya may lead the gods in battle against the *asuras*, but when Viṣṇu himself defeats them it is not by force but through guile, as in the churning of the ocean (*Viṣṇu* 1.9) or when he deludes them into heresy in 3.17.

The theme of the *devāsura* conflict is strong again in the *Bhāgavata*. Varāha kills Hiraṇyāksa as well as rescuing the earth from the cosmic deluge (3.13–19). The story of VṚtra is retold, although in a different key from that of the Vedic narrative (6.7–13).[30] The gods' gaining of the *amṚta* is followed by a battle between *devas* and *asuras* (8.10–11). Matsya kills an āsuric adversary, Hayagrīva, in his rescue of the Vedas (8.24.7–9,57). Only occasionally, however, does the *Bhāgavata* say that the destruction of *asuras* is the *avatāras*' purpose. Nārada suggests it to Yudhisthira in 1.13.48 and Ṛṣabha's son Drumila tells Nimi:

> In the war between the gods and the *asuras* he killed the Daitya leaders for the sake of the gods … (*devāsure yudhi ca daityapatīn surārthe hatvā* … 11.4.20a).

Yet there are signs in the *Bhāgavata* that the connection with the *devāsura* wars is becoming an embarrassment, not, as in the *Viṣṇu*, because the Supreme God is regarded as above such violence, but because supporting the *devas* against the *asuras* is now seen as too partisan for one whose love extends to all creatures impartially Thus the story of Narasimha begins with Parīkṣit's question to Śuka:

> 1 Since the Lord himself is impartial and a dear friend of beings, O brahmin, why for Indra's sake did he kill Daityas as though he were against them? 2 His purpose is not [served] by the hosts of gods, since he himself is the highest good in person, nor is it hatred or fear of the *asuras* on the part of the one who is without qualities (1 *samah priyah suhṚd brahman bhūtānāṃ bhagavān svayam / indrasyārthe kathaṃ daityān avadhād viṣamo yathā //* 2 *na hy asyārthaḥ suragaṇaiḥ sākṣān niḥśreyasātmanaḥ / naivāsurebhyo vidveṣo nodvegaś cāguṇasya hi //* 7.1.1–2)

As part of his answer Śuka says that Yudhisthira was once troubled by the fact that the unrighteous Śiśupāla had obtained union with Kṛṣṇa on being killed by him. He asked Nārada why Śiśupāla should receive this grace when Vena,[31] who was no wickeder than he, had received only punishment (7.1.15–20). Nārada gave him what were in effect two different answers (7.1.25–31). The first was that union with Kṛṣṇa can be obtained by concentrating any intense emotion upon him. It may be desire, as with the *gopīs*, fear (Kaṃsa), hatred (Śiśupāla), or the affection which springs from kinship (the Vṛṣṇis),[32] from friendship (the Pāṇḍavas), or from *bhakti* (Nārada).[33] The second answer was that Śiśupāla and his brother Dantavaktra were really Viṣṇu's doorkeepers, Jaya and Vijaya, working through the consequences of a curse over a period of three lives. His killing of them was a benevolent action, setting them free from their third lifetime (7.1.32,35–8). This leads into the story of one of Śiśupāla's earlier lives, as the Daitya king Hiranyakaśipu who persecutes his virtuous son Prahlāda and is killed by Narasiṃha. The idea of obtaining release by being the Lord's enemy will be explored in the next subsection. It illustrates the difference between the Viṣṇu's treatment and the *Bhāgavata*'s of the *devāsura* conflict. Whereas the *Viṣṇu* suppresses it, the *Bhāgavata* sublimates it by making Kṛṣṇa the saviour of victim and enemy alike.

v) The provision of the means of liberation

The purposes of the *avatāras* which have so far been considered are in keeping with the ideas which stem from *BhG* 4.7–8, and in accordance with the traditional image of the *avatāra* as preserver of the cosmic order. However, the cosmic order is transitory, and becomes insignificant when seen within the perspective of the eternal reality which underlies and overarches it. True preservation lies not in being saved within it but in being released out of it. Moreover the Supreme God who performs this work of preservation cannot be exhaustively identified with the interests of the cosmic order which he preserves: his own motives and interests must lie somewhere beyond it.

The last two expressions of the *avatāra*'s purpose reflect this transcendent dimension which has so far been lacking, and examples of them are found mostly in the *Bhāgavata*. In neither the *Harivaṃśa* nor the *Viṣṇu* is any *avatāra* said to bring release from *saṃsāra*, but in the *Bhāgavata* there is another link with one of the ‘ten characteristic topics’, the *mukti* included in the list of 2.10.1, which is defined in *Bhāgavata* 2.10.6 as ‘abandoning any other form and remaining in the essential form’ (*muktir hitvānyathā rūpaṃ svarūpeṇa vyavasthitiḥ*).

The idea that the *avatāra* comes to make liberation available is strong in the *Bhāgavata*. Sometimes this is through teaching. Kapila and Rsabha are said to have come into the world for this liberating purpose (3.24.10,36; 5.6.12), Kapila's teaching being set out in 3.25–32 and Rsabha's in 5.5.[34] Kapila tells Kardama that his birth in this world is for the sake of those who desire release (3.24.36). He has come to teach the *ātmapatha*, the way of self-realisation (3.24.37; 3.33.5).[35] Rsabha says of himself: 'This *avatāra* was in order to give instructions about liberation to those who are swallowed up in darkness' (*ayam avatāro rajasopaplutakaivalyopaśikṣaṇārthaḥ*, 5.6.12).[36] Kṛṣṇa introduces his own teaching in Book 11 as a means by which Uddhava, and indeed whoever receives it, will obtain unity with *brahman* (11.7.9–10).

The *Bhāgavata* states at several points that telling or hearing *avatāra* stories is conducive to liberation. This does not simply mean the stories of Kṛṣṇa (cf. 10.52.20; 10.57.42; 10.66.43; 10.69.45; 10.74.54; 10.85.59), but those of other *avatāras* also, e.g. 3.14.4; 3.19.38 (Varāha); 8.23.30 (Vāmana). It is implied that Kalki's mission is intended to bring the righteous to liberation, since it is 'for the destruction of the past births and deeds of the righteous' (… *sādhūnāṃ janmakarmāpannuttaye*, 12.2.17).

However, it is not only the righteous, or those who are devoted to Kṛṣṇa who are offered liberation through contact with an *avatāra* or through dwelling on his story. The idea has already been encountered that concentrating any strong emotion upon an *avatāra*, even hate or fear, can bring release. It is touched upon at other points in the *purāṇa* besides 7.1. Commenting in 3.2.24 on Pūtanā's death, Uddhava says that he regards *asuras* as *bhaktas* because their minds are fixed on the Lord as their enemy. In 8.22.6 Bali declares that the salvific property of deep-seated enmity is well-known. Nārada recalls in 11.5.48 how Śiśupāla, Pauṇḍraka and Śālva obtained liberation through their hatred of Kṛṣṇa.

Seen from this point of view the enemies whom the *avatāra* defeats obtain just as much benefit from his actions as the victims whom he rescues. In Book 10 the simple fact of being killed by Kṛṣṇa is regarded as sufficient to give *mokṣa*. Pūtanā's murderous pretence of motherly affection causes the infant Kṛṣṇa to bring about her death, which gives her unity with him (10.6.34–5,37; 10.14.35). Her brother Agha achieves this unity when Kṛṣṇa kills him by entering his mouth and suffocating him (10.12.38–9). In Kamsa's case his hatred of Kṛṣṇa is said to be so obsessive that he sees him as filling the universe, so that when Kṛṣṇa kills him, he merges into his form (10.44.39). Thus the *Bhāgavata* transforms the *Harivaṃśa*'s motif of Viṣṇu the gods'

champion and killer of *asuras* into that of Kṛṣṇa the deliverer of all.[37]

Although it is only in the *Bhāgavata* that this theme is fully developed, it is present also in the *Viṣṇu*.[38] In *Viṣṇu* 4.15.4–17 Parāśara answers Maitreya's question as to why Hiraṇyakaśipu, reborn as Rāvana, and in both lives killed by Viṣṇu, as Narasiṃha and as Rāma, should have attained absorption into the Supreme God only in a further rebirth when, as Śiśupāla, he was killed by Kṛṣṇa. He explains that this was due to Śiśupāla's intense preoccupation with the sight and thought of Kṛṣṇa. He has continually kept in his mind the four-armed form with its weapons and ornaments,[39] and even though this was in hatred it was enough to enable him to be 'made one with *brahman*' (*brahmabhūta*) when Kṛṣṇa's discus dealt the fatal blow (4.15.13–14). Moreover, after Naraka's death his mother, Earth, says that his death at Kṛṣṇa's hands has been 'for his purification' (*adoṣāya*, 5.29.29).

A development which belongs to the *Bhāgavata* alone, however, is the devaluation of *mokṣa* in favour of *bhakti*. Prahlāda announces that *bhakti* is the highest of all human aims:

> To such an extent the highest aim of man in this world is said to be single-minded devotion to Govinda, seeing him everywhere (*etāvān eva loke 'smin puṃsaḥ svārthaḥ paraḥ smṚtaḥ / ekāntabhaktir govinde yat sarvatra tadīkṣaṇam* // 7.7.55; cf.1.2.6; 6.3.22)

And Kṛṣṇa commends to Uddhava the attitude of the *gopīs* (11.12.8–13). Their love for him exceeds all their other concerns, and this counts for more than yogic practices or desire for *mokṣa*. As Kṛṣṇa says:

> Not Brahmā's supremacy, nor great Indra's region, nor the world conqueror's sway, nor rule over the underworld, neither yogic accomplishments nor release from rebirth does he desire whose mind is fixed upon me. He desires nothing other than me (*na pārameṣṣhyaṃ na mahendradhiṣṇyaṃ na sārvabhaumaṃ na rasādhipatyam / na yogasiddhīr apunarbhavaṃ vā mayy arpitātmecchati madvināyat* // 11.14.14)

vi) Spontaneous enjoyment (*līlā*)

Perhaps the most significant contribution which the *Bhāgavata* makes to the question of the *avatāras*' purpose is its use of the compound *līlāvatāra* (1.2.34; 2.6.45; 8.24.29; 10.70.39; 11.11.20; 12.12.45).[40] For the reference to *līlā* throws the *avatāras*' purpose into a new light. They are 'play-*avatāras*', 'appearances for fun', and in this sense their purpose cannot be questioned. If the Supreme God chooses to reveal himself this in itself is sufficient. The *līlāvatāras* are a form of self-expression, willingly and joyfully embarked upon by the God who creates and upholds the world. This may seem to be at odds with the ideas found in the *Gītā* of the *avatāras*' concern with the restoration of

dharma. Indeed, David Kinsley sees this playfulness as incompatible with a concern for *dharma*, and speaks of Kṛṣṇa's 'entire life at VṚndāvana' as 'frivolous, purposeless'.[41] Yet for the *Bhāgavata* the playful and the purposeful may exist together. In 1.3.36 the Lord is said to be *amoghalīlaḥ*, 'he whose play is productive' (cf. 2.9.27; 10.16.49).

Thus it is not surprising to find that sometimes the Lord's 'play-appearances' are said to have a purpose, or at least useful consequences. When King Satyavrata has been rescued by Nārāyana in the form of a fish, he says to him: 'All your *lūlāvatāras* are the cause of prosperity in beings' (*sarve lūlāvatāras te bhūtānāṃ bhūtihetavaḥ*, 8.24.29). According to 10.70.39 the *lūlāvatāras* bring liberation (*vimokṣaṇa*). Moreover, references to play are sometimes found in close connection with echoes of the *Gūtā*, e.g. in 10.46.39:

> Although he has no past deeds [to compel him to be reborn] in the world, in wombs which are good, bad or mixed, for his own amusement he effects the rescue of the righteous (*na cāsya karma vā loke sadasanmiśrayoniṣu / krīḍarthaḥ so 'pi sādhūnāṃ paritrāṇāya kalpate //*)

In another passage which echoes *BhG* 4.7–8, there is said to be no reason for Hari's birth, even though it occurs in connection with the increase of evil and the decline of *dharma* (9.24.56–7; cf. 10.40.16). Again, the operations of creation, maintenance and destruction are said to be part of the Lord's play (10.46.40; 10.50.30; 10.57.15), and the operation which is most characteristic of Viṣṇu, maintenance, is particularly connected with play and enjoyment. In 7.1.10, Śuka says that 'the lord [uses] *sattva* [the *guṇa* which is particularly connected with maintenance] when he wants to enjoy himself in various [forms]' (*sattvaṃ vicitrāsu riraṃsur īśvaraḥ*), and in 11.9.21, God's way with the universe is compared with the activity of a spider which consumes its web after first making it and then 'playing with it' (*tayā vihṚtya*): here playing comes between making and consuming, just as maintenance comes between creation and destruction.

The description of Viṣṇu's 'descents' as *lūlāvatāras* rules out completely the assertion made in *Matsya* 47 and elsewhere[42] that Viṣṇu was forced to appear in human form because of BhṚgu's curse. As acts of *līlā* his descents are spontaneous and joyful, not forced by any external agency. Even removing the earth's burden is not a difficult task to him: it is something which can be done *līlayā* (either 'in play' or 'with ease').

Although it is the *Bhāgavata* which particularly emphasises play, it is a note which is sometimes sounded in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* as well. In describing Kṛṣṇa's childhood exploits, the former often uses

the word *śiśulīlā*,[43] an ambiguous word which could mean either 'childish play' or 'playing at being a child'. In *Hv* 56.57 it is almost certainly intended in the second sense, because it comes immediately after a *śloka* in which Kṛṣṇa announces that he has a serious purpose in entering Kāliya's pool. In 65.31b Kaṃsa declares that he has seen through this play of Kṛṣṇa's: 'He who is not a child has assumed childhood and enjoys himself playing at being a child' (*abālo bālyam āsthāya ramate bālalīlayā*). In his final eulogy of Kṛṣṇa, Nārada identifies him with 'Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, sun and moon' and goes on to say:

> Unfathomable, unattached, and able to go wherever you will, possessed of authority, you forever take pleasure in beings, as a child in its toys (*aprameyo 'niyojyaś ca yatrakāmagamo vaśī / modaty eṣa sadā bhūtair bālaḥ krīḍanakair iva // Hv* 97.37; cf. *Vāyu* 98.96)

A somewhat similar statement is made about Viṣṇu in *Viṣṇu* 1.2.18. After identifying Viṣṇu with *brahman* and explaining his four basic forms, Parāśara invites Maitreya to 'hear the deeds of him who plays like a little boy' (*krīḍato bālakasyeva ceṣṭāṃ tasya niśāmaya*). However, *līlā* is used mostly of Kṛṣṇa in the *Viṣṇu*, particularly in places where someone is pointing beyond what meets the human eye in his story to the divinity which is always present. When encouraging Kṛṣṇa to use his power against Kāliya, Rāma reminds him that he is not only involved himself in 'the game of being human' (*manuṣyalīlā*) but has brought other celestial beings to earth to join in the game (5.7.39–40). Describing Kṛṣṇa's inability to defeat Jarāsaṃdha for many years, Parāśara twice uses the phrase 'the universal master's game' (*līlā sā jagatīpateḥ*, 5.22.14; *līlā jagatpates*, 5.22.18) to suggest that Kṛṣṇa is only playing at being an unsuccessful general. Śiva speaks of the forms which Kṛṣṇa has taken for his *līlā* (5.33.42), and finally Vyāsa explains to Arjuna why the Ābhīras have been able to defeat him now that Kṛṣṇa is dead:

> O son of PṚthā, this is the game played by Hari, who is all beings: that you have destroyed the Kauravas and that the Ābhīras have defeated you (*pārthaitat sarvabhūtasya harer līlāviceṣṭitam / tvayā yat kaurava dhvastā yad ābhīrair bhavāñ jitaḥ // Viṣṇu* 5.38.69)

The fact that most of these instances come from the later part of the story shows that it is Kṛṣṇa's whole life which is seen as *līlā*, not simply his childhood games.

To return to the *Bhāgavata*, its emphasis upon *līlā* is in accordance with the importance which it gives to childhood, both Kṛṣṇa's childhood in Book 10 and the early years of his *mahābhāgavatas* which are mentioned so frequently throughout the *purāṇa*.[44] But it is not only Kṛṣṇa whose actions are performed in a spirit of playfulness. This is said of several other *avatāras* also. The story of Varāha is summed

up as ‘a marvellous game’ (*mahadbhūtam vikrīḍitam*, 3.19.37),[45] and later as Hari's *līlā* (3.20.8). Narasimha's story is described as ‘the Primal Man's lion-play’ (*ādipuruṣasya mṚgendralīlām*, 7.10.47). In 8.6.17, in the episode of the churning of the ocean, the Lord is said to be ‘wanting to play’ (*vihartukāmas*), an expression which occurs again as a description of Matsya in 8.24.31 (cf. 8.24.54). Rāma Dāśarathi's exploits are described as *līlā* in 9.11.20. Vāmana is not described as playing, but Bali's wife Vindhyāvalī speaks of his having created the three worlds ‘for his own amusement’ (*krīḍārtham ātmana*, 8.22.30).[46]

When Prahlāda is praising Narasiṃha he says: ‘The Lord's game with his beautiful *avatāras* is for the welfare and prosperity of this world and for his own pleasure’ (*kṣemāya bhūtaya utātmāsukhāya cāsya vikrīḍitaṃ bhagavato rucirāvatāraiḥ*, 7.9.13b). These words point to the fact that *līlā* is to be seen not so much as one possible purpose of the Lord's *avatāras* as a quality which inheres in the *avatāras* and in their actions, whatever their purpose may be. The *avatāra* restores *dharma*, destroys *asuras*, or removes Earth's burden, and fulfils these purposes joyfully and freely, finding in them a source of amusement and pleasure for himself over and above any benefit his actions may confer upon the world. In return his *bhaktas* respond with ‘disinterested devotion’ (*ahaitukīṃ bhaktim*, 1.7.10), not because they have no reason to be devoted to Kṛṣṇa, but because they mirror his spontaneous enjoyment in freely giving themselves to him in love and service.

Chapter Nine

The Supreme Reality: Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu?

The question was raised at the beginning of this study: is Kṛṣṇa to be considered alongside Viṣṇu as a contender for the title of Supreme God, or is he to be seen as one of Viṣṇu's manifestations? It will be obvious by now that there is no 'correct' answer to this question. The *Viṣṇu* points in one direction and the *Bhāgavata* in another, and both directions have found acceptance within Vaiṣṇavism. This final chapter will begin by looking at the answers which all three texts give to this question, particularly in relation to the three words which the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* use to express the Supreme Reality: *brahman, paramātman* and *bhagavān*. Then Kṛṣṇa's relation to the other avatāras will be examined, both to the figures found in the *avatāra* lists generally and to his brother in particular. Last of all, the integrity and creativity of these texts will be reconsidered.

KṚṢṆA AND VIṢṆU IN THREE PERSPECTIVES

Near the beginning of the *Bhāgavata* Sūta tells his questioners in the forest of Naimiṣa:

> Those who know the truth say that the truth which is the knowledge of non-duality is called *brahman, paramātman* and *bhagavān* (*yadanti tat tattvavidas tattvam yaj jñānam advayam / brahmeti paramātmeti bhagavān iti śabdyate //* 1.2.11)[1]

The identification of *brahman* and *paramātman* here is not surprising. From the time of the early Upanisads thinkers had equated the reality which undergirds the cosmos, the undefinable *brahman* with the *ātman*, the reality which undergirds the individual consciousness (cf.

BAU 4.4.25; *ChU* 8.14.1; *ŚU* 1.15–16) and which can only be described in negatives (*neti neti, BAU* 2.3.6)[2]. The concept of *bhagavān* emerged later than either of these two. *Bhagavān* is a word with a wide range of meanings. It can be used as an honorific title or form of address, which can be given by one human being to another who is regarded as venerable, or to any divine being. It can also be used in an absolute sense, in very much the same way that 'God' is used by many English-speaking Christians, i.e. for the all-powerful and loving Person who controls the universe and inspires the love of his worshippers.[3] In this absolute sense, the only one with which this chapter is concerned, *bhagavān* is a third version of the Supreme Reality, able to relate itself in a personal way to individuals, but just as ultimate as *brahman* or *paramātman*.

The use of these terms in each of the three texts under consideration will be examined. However, as was stated on page 2, none of them 'has ever been regarded, or ought to be regarded, as a piece of systematic theology', so that the use of theological terms cannot provide more than a partial answer to the question of whether Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is to be seen as the Supreme Reality. As in earlier chapters, therefore, the main interest here is still in how each text answers the question through its selection and arrangement of traditional material, its combination of this with new composition and its overall structuring of material old and new.

The *Harivaṃśa*

For the *Harivaṃśa* neither Kṛṣṇa nor Viṣṇu is seen in any kind of ultimate perspective. Of the three words which the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* both use for the Supreme Reality, *brahman* is extremely rare in *Hv* 1–98,[4] *paramātman* occurs only twice, in neither instance referring directly to Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu,[5] and *bhagavān* is almost always used simply as an honorific title,[6] and only very occasionally in the absolute sense of 'the Lord' or 'God'. These absolute uses are, with one or two exceptions,[7] in contexts where Viṣṇu's transcendent status is being emphasised: 31.153, 39.6,29, 40.3. The general impression which the *Harivaṃśa* makes upon the hearer/reader is of having no great concern at all with the Supreme Reality.

This impression confirms that which emerges from the exploration of the *Harivaṃśa* in Chapters 2 and 3. Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa were seen there to be presented as celestial and earthly counterparts. Although neither of them is said to be the Supreme Reality in any truly ultimate sense, Viṣṇu is supreme among the gods in that he can give them victory over their enemies (32.30–9; 38.58), and is able to pass

beyond their comprehension in his yogic sleep (40.15–17). Kṛṣṇa is the human counterpart which Viṣṇu has created for himself, the protector of his people and victorious enemy of *asuras*, from his earliest days beyond the comprehension of those around him.

The hint of divine transcendence conveyed by the description of Viṣṇu's yogic sleep in *Hv* 40 is connected also with Kṛṣṇa in the word *āścarya* which the *Harivaṃśa* applies to both of them.[8] Yet on the whole the *Harivaṃśa* sees Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa in heroic terms: each of them is at the centre of an exciting story, where he performs great deeds. Kṛṣṇa's story is ultimately dependent upon Viṣṇu's, since it is as the latter's aṃś;a that he enters the world (*Hv* 44.6), and as his *prādurbhāva* that he appears among the other manifestations of *Hv* 31. Once Kṛṣṇa is born, however, his story unfolds in such absorbing detail that other appearances of Viṣṇu are forgotten. Concealment and revelation alternate with each other — as indeed they do to a lesser extent in the *Harivaṃśa*'s presentation of Viṣṇu[9] - so that the hearer/ reader follows the story with unflagging attention.

The *Harivaṃśa*'s presentation of the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu relies largely upon the skilful juxtaposition of various blocks of purāṇic material in its first book, the *Harivaṃśaparvan*, so that they form a setting for Kṛṣṇa's story in the second book, the *Viṣṇuparvan*. This setting gives the hearer /reader clues as to Kṛṣṇa's identity and true nature by offering parallels between the two. As Viṣṇu offers protection to the gods and *asuras* (32.30–9), so will Kṛṣṇa protect the herder settlement. As Viṣṇu kills Kālanemi, so will Kṛṣṇa slay Kaṃsa. As Viṣṇu sees himself being offered sacrificial worship in the *brahmaloka* (39.20), so will Kṛṣṇa at Govardhana (60.18–22). As Viṣṇu emits and reabsorbs all creatures (40.14), so will Kṛṣṇa emit wolves from himself (52.29–33) in order to force the cowherds into settling in VṚndāvana.

By applying *āścarya* to both Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, the *Harivaṃśa* remains non-commital as to the precise nature of the relationship between them. Both represent the same mystery, unfathomable to the human mind, and therefore both are suspended against one another in the imagination's balance. Such a balance was almost bound to be disturbed in one direction or the other in any further attempt to portray the relationship.

The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*

For the *Viṣṇu* the balance falls emphatically on the side of Viṣṇu. In this *purāṇa*'s vision, he is ‘the supreme *brahman* from whom this whole universe originates, who is the universe, in whom it exists and

into whom it will be absorbed' (… *paraṃ brahma yatah sarvam idaṃ jagat / jagac ca yo yatra cedaṃ yasmiṃś ca layam eṣyati //* 2.7.41). The identification between Viṣṇu and *brahman* is of paramount importance. It is true that Kṛṣṇa is also said to be *brahman* in 4.11.4, 5.13.22, 5.18.53 and 5.23.34, but the text as a whole makes clear that these references belong to Kṛṣṇa as identified with Viṣṇu rather than to Kṛṣṇa in his own right. *Paramātman* also is used far more often of Viṣṇu than of Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand *bhagavān* is applied frequently to Kṛṣṇa as well as to Viṣṇu, not only in Book 5, but also in several verses of Book 4, although there it is used in a rather matter of fact way, as if to provide an alternative to the name Kṛṣṇa without any ontological implications.[10] This usage is probably not intended, therefore, to put Kṛṣṇa on the same level as Viṣṇu, particularly as *bhagavān* is also used of Brahmā in 4.1.65–96, where he speaks of Viṣṇu as higher than himself (vv83–90), and is certainly not being presented as the Supreme God. The overall impression is that *bhagavān* is not an important word for the *Viṣṇu*. What matters here, above all else, is *brahman*.

The *Viṣṇu* turns the *Harivaṃśa's* structure inside out. Instead of using the purāṇic cosmic history simply to introduce Viṣṇu's transformation into Kṛṣṇa, it makes the history itself its main concern, part of its picture of the universe as Viṣṇu's empire. Compared with this picture, the story of Kṛṣṇa is almost superfluous. Viṣṇu has no need of lesser manifestations by which to project himself on to the world's screen. He can manifest himself in his own form to his devotees whenever he likes.

Whereas the *Viṣṇu* identifies *brahman* and Viṣṇu as closely as possible, it goes to some lengths to distance Viṣṇu from Kṛṣṇa. It links the two by the story of Viṣṇu's two hairs,[11] rather than by that of his personal descent to earth. It presents Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu's *aṃsāṃśa*, the mere fraction of himself which is nevertheless enough to deal with the triple world's problems. When it looks for a symbol of human devotion it turns to Prahlāda who is Viṣṇu's devotee, not Kṛṣṇa's. Through him, *bhakti* in the *Viṣṇu* is focused on Viṣṇu rather than Kṛṣṇa. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, of all the forms apart from his own in which Viṣṇu manifests himself in the cosmos, that of Kṛṣṇa is the most appropriate focus for devotion. The *Viṣṇu* appears to accept this fact: it makes no attempt to enclose Kṛṣṇa in an *avatāra* list, and the prayers and eulogies addressed to him in Book 5 are couched in the same language as those addressed to Viṣṇu in Book 1 and elsewhere.[12] At the same time it issues a warning against mistaking Kṛṣṇa, or any other *avatāra* form, for the Supreme Reality: 1.4.17, 1.19.80, 5.7.67 and 5.9.28 all differentiate between the *avatāra* forms

and the highest form of all, and urge true *bhaktas* to seek the latter.

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*

For the *Bhāgavata, brahman, paramātman* and *bhagavān* all refer principally to Kṛṣṇa. He himself applies *brahman* to himself in 10.3.45 and 10.73.23, and in his teaching of Uddhava (11.12.13, 15.17, 20.37).[13] In Book 7, where Kṛṣṇa is not apparently in the picture, Nārada adds these words to the story of Prahlāda which he has been relating to Yudhiṣṣhira:

> 48 You are very lucky in the world of men, because sages who purify the world come to you, and in your homes is said to dwell the supreme *brahman* in person, concealed in the form of a man. 49 He, your dear friend, indeed your maternal cousin, your revered self, your servant and teacher, is *brahman*, the experience of the bliss of liberation and nirvāṇa sought after by the great (48 *yūyaṃ*[14] *nṚloke bata bhūribhāgā lokaṃ punānā munayo 'bhiyanti / yeṣāṃ grhān āvasatīti sākṣād gūḍhaṃ paraṃ brahma manuṣyaliṅgam //* 49 *sa vā ayaṃ brahma mahadvimṚgyakaivalyanirvāṇasukhānubhūtiḥ / priyaḥ suhṚd vaḥ khalu mātuleya ātmārhaṇīyo vidhikṚd guruś ca //* 7.10.48–9)

This is such an important message that the *Bhāgavata* has Nārada repeat it verbatim in 7.15.75–6 at the end of his exposition of *varṇāśramadharma*, and underlines it by saying that 'PṚthā's son [i.e. Yudhiṣṣhira] was absolutely amazed to hear that Kṛṣṇa was the supreme *brahman*' (*śrutvā kṚ ṣ ṇaṃ paraṃ brahma pārthaḥ paramavismitaḥ*, 7.15.79).

Of the three words which can express the Supreme Reality, the most important for the *Bhāgavata* is *bhagavān*. It is used more often of Kṛṣṇa than of Viṣṇu.[15] This is true of the purāṇa as a whole, not simply of Book 10, where one would expect *bhagavān* to be used much more frequently of Kṛṣṇa than of any one else. In Book 1 *bhagavān* refers almost exclusively to him, so that when in Book 2 it is used for the Supreme Being, the hearer/ reader immediately associates this Supreme Being with Kṛṣṇa. This association is strengthened by the fact that at the beginning of Book 3 the attention is brought back to Kṛṣṇa by the account of Vidura's meeting with Uddhava and the latter's report of Kṛṣṇa's death. Thus the *Bhāgavata* reinforces the point made in 1.3.28 that 'Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself' (*kṚ ṣ ṇas tu bhagavān svayam*).

It is not possible to give a detailed analysis here of the uses of the title *bhagavān* in the *Bhāgavata*. Indeed, such an analysis is unnecessary: more to the point are the three main images which the word conjures up. The first is the image of Kṛṣṇa, since he is the first person in the text of whom it is used. The second is the 'form of the Cosmic Man' (*pauruṣaṃ rūpam*) which *bhagavān* is said in 1.3.1 to assume in order to produce the universe and his own appearances

within it. This is later called 'the primal *avatāra*' (*ādyo 'vatāra*, 2.6.41; 3.6.8), the first revelation of God in the cosmos, which serves as the ground plan and material cause of creation, and from which spring all other beings, notably those which are designated in the *Bhāgavata* by the words *avatāra, a* ṃ *śsa* and *kalā*. It is 'the only seed of hundreds of *avatāras*' (*avatāraśataikabïjam*, 3.9.2). This picture of the universe as man-shaped is, of course, a reflection of the *Puruṣasūkta*, and is constantly present in the *Bhāgavata* (2.5.35–6.21; 3.6; 3.7.22–4; 3.26.51–72; 7.9.36; 8.5.32–44; 8.7.26–8; 10.63.35–6; 11.5.2; 11.17.13–15; 12.11.4–9). But in the *Bhāgavata* the cosmos is not so much man-shaped as specifically Kṛṣṇa-shaped.

The third image is the form which has been encountered in the *Viṣṇu* as a focus for yogic meditation: the Lord's four-armed form, holding the traditional discus, conch, mace and lotus, and adorned with the traditional *śrïvatsa* and *kaustubha*. In 3.28.12–34, its first occurrence in the *Bhāgavata*, it is introduced as 'the form of the Lord' (*kāṣṣhāṃ bhagavato*, v. 12) rather than as that of Viṣṇu. In 11.11.46 Kṛṣṇa describes this same form to Uddhava as his own (*madrūpam*), as he does also in 11.14.37–46 and 11.27.37–9. By claiming this form as Kṛṣṇa's rather than as Viṣṇu's, the *Bhāgavata* again stresses the identity between Kṛṣṇa and the Lord. In 4.30.4–7 this form is said to be that of 'the eternal Cosmic Man' (*puruṣas tu sanātana*ḥ, v.4).

In its rearrangement of what the *Viṣṇu* has already arranged, the *Bhāgavata* passes all the material through its own transforming filter. Now it is Kṛṣṇa rather than Viṣṇu who fills the universe. His story and the cosmic history interlock with each other so that each may be seen as containing the other. Various possible perspectives are offered to the hearer/reader. The whole purāṇa may be taken as an account of the last seven days of Parïkṣit's life, in which this *mahābhāgavata* fixes his mind upon Kṛṣṇa in preparation for dying and is fortified by Śuka's recital. From another point of view it is the story of Kṛṣṇa, with the cosmic history inserted between his introductory appearances in 1.7–15 and 3.1–4 and the full presentation of his life and teaching in Books 10–11. From yet another point of view, the *Bhāgavata* may be seen as a history of the cosmos, with Kṛṣṇa's life story at the appropriate chronological point on the eve of the present *kaliyuga*. Whatever the perspective, Kṛṣṇa is always the Supreme Reality who encompasses all things, and yet can appear within the parameters of time and space.

Thus, for the *Bhāgavata* the form which is presented for meditation and worship is now Kṛṣṇa's, and it is Kṛṣṇa who is continually identified with *brahman* and *paramātman*, Kṛṣṇa who is *bhagavān svayam*. It is the character of Kṛṣṇa, gracious and all-attractive, and

willing to bestow release upon all, which now determines the *avatāras*' purposes. This view of Kṛṣṇa is not only built into the very structure of the text, as was shown in Chapter 6, but is highlighted in his story, and in the contrasts which are made between the apparent insignificance of the young Kṛṣṇa with his true identity as *brahman*. His cowherd playmates are playing 'with the experience of the bliss *of brahman*' (*brahmasukhānubhūtyā*, 10.12.11); when Kṛṣṇa has multiplied himself to become all the boys of VṚndāvana their mothers 'suckle the supreme *brahman*, thinking it to be their sons' (*matvā paraṃ brahma sutān apāyayan*, 10.13.22); Kṛṣṇa's *brahmatā* is said to be unrecognised by the *gopïs* (10.29.12).

Which side of this contrast is more important for the *Bhāgavata*? Do its composers want its hearers/readers to see Kṛṣṇa as God whom they can adore in human form, to whom they can relate in a personal sense, without loss of their own identity? Or is his human form a symbol for that state of being which can only be realised by passing beyond all forms in the total identification of intense contemplation? Both of these perspectives are undoubtedly present in the *Bhāgavata*, but there is some ambiguity as to whether one is intended to take precedence over the other, and, if so, which it should be.

Perhaps the solution to this problem lies with the *gopïs* who, for the *Bhāgavata* are the highest example of devotion to Kṛṣṇa (10.47.58–63).[16] Their conversations with him, and their songs about him, show a progression in their attitude towards him, from their early delight in seeing him and his brother Rāma and in hearing the sound of their flutes (10.21), through the ecstasies of contact and the torments of separation described in 10.29–33,35 and the pain of Kṛṣṇa's departure from VṚndāvana, both at the time of its happening (10.39.13–31) and in recollection (10.47.12–21, 39–52; 10.65.15), until they arrive at last in 10.82.40–9 at a state in which they merge with him. This final merging would suggest that for the *Bhāgavata* the religion of *bhakti* gives way to *advaita* at the deepest level. Indeed, Hacker claims that *advaita* represents the *Bhāgavata*'s true position.[17]

Yet at the same time the vividness with which the *gopïs*' emotions are portrayed, the passages in which *bhakti* is regarded as a higher state than release from *saṃsāra*,[18] and the expositions of *bhāgavatadharma*, with their emphasis upon an emotional personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa - all these make a sharper impact upon the hearer/reader of the *Bhāgavata* than do its more philosophical expressions of *advaita*. Certainly this side of the *Bhāgavata* has been more influential historically. Largely through Caitanya and Vallabha, and the movements which they initiated, the ecstasies of the *gopïs* in the early days of their love for Kṛṣṇa vibrate more strongly in the

imagination than do their final acceptance of physical separation and yogic union.[19]

To sum up, the *Harivaṃśa* does not concern itself much with questions as to the Supreme Reality, the *Viṣṇu* proclaims Viṣṇu as supreme, and the *Bhāgavata* asserts the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa. None of the texts suggests that Reality transcends any personal figure, or that in the polar relationship between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa one pole should be seen as representing God's supremacy and the other his accessibility. Even if the *Viṣṇu* did not mention Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Viṣṇu would still be seen making himself accessible to Dhruva and Prahlāda in Book 1. Even though the *Bhāgavata* portrays Kṛṣṇa as accessible to his devotees, he still transcends Yaśodā's efforts to hold him with her rope and disappears mysteriously from among the adoring *gopīs*. For their worshippers both Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa display both the transcendent supremacy and loving accessibility of the true God.

THE LORD OF THE *AVATĀRAS*

When the question was raised in the first chapter of how the worshippers of Kṛṣṇa came to countenance the subordination of their deity to Viṣṇu,[20] the answer given at that point was that this was the easiest way of accommodating Kṛṣṇa's human story within the composite Vaiṣṇava picture of God. At first sight it would appear that the inclusion of Kṛṣṇa in any *avatāra* list would inevitably subordinate him permanently to Viṣṇu as one of the latter's manifestations. Yet the *Bhāgavata*, in spite of containing two such lists where Kṛṣṇa appears in this light, has no difficulty in presenting an overall picture of him as the Supreme God. Indeed, for all three texts the *avatāra* lists are ambiguous as far as Kṛṣṇa's status is concerned. They see it in three different perspectives, so that besides lists which assume that Kṛṣṇa is one manifestation among many (and even these may be subtly subverted), there are also those which show him as the focal point of the series, or even as the source of the whole series of manifestations. Each of these perspectives will now be examined in turn.

Kṛṣṇa as one manifestation among many

In *Hv* 31.143–7 Kṛṣṇa appears as the eighth member of a series of nine, the last of the *prādurbhāvas* to have appeared in the world, with Kalki yet to come (v. 148). Although this position could be regarded as making him the climax of the series, the story of Kṛṣṇa is given so little prominence that it is hard to see it in this light. Three of the other *prādurbhāva* stories are related in much greater detail (Narasimha, 31.31–67; Vāmana, 31.68–92; Rāma Dāśarathi, 31.110–

42). Moreover, the reign of Rāma is described in 31.129–39 in such ideal terms that the hearer/reader could easily assume that he, and not Kṛṣṇa, is the climax of this list. After the description of the truth and righteousness of Rāma's rule, all that 31.143–7 offers is a list of *asuras* killed by Kṛṣṇa, whose manifestation is simply said to be ‘for the good of all the worlds’ (*sarvalokahitāya*, v. 143). Nevertheless, however briefly Kṛṣṇa may be mentioned in *Hv* 31.143–7, the whole list appears in a different perspective when one considers that it is given to Janamejaya in answer to his question in 30.1–8, which is about Kṛṣṇa alone. Seen in this light, all other manifestations of Viṣṇu are dependent upon his all-important manifestation as Kṛṣṇa.

In the first and last *avatāra* lists given by the *Bhāgavata*, 1.3.6–25 and 11.4.17–22, Kṛṣṇa is apparently seen simply as one manifestation among many. In 1.3.23 he is mentioned together with his brother Rāma:

> In his nineteenth and twentieth [descents] the Lord took birth among the VṚ ṣ ṇis as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, and removed the earth's burden (*ekonaviṃ śe viṃ śatime vṚ ṣ ṇiṣu prāpya janmanï / rāmakṚ ṣ ṇāv iti bhuvo bhagavān aharad bharam //*)

Yet no sooner has the list been recited than the hearer/reader is reminded that in the wider context of the *Bhāgavata's* total perspective, Kṛṣṇa is not one among many but ‘the Lord himself’ (*bhagavān svayam*, 1.3.28) who took the form of the Cosmic Man, according to 1.3.1, and thus became the source of the primal avatāra from which all the others are derived.[21] The reference to Kṛṣṇa in 11.4.17–22, however, where he shares a verse with the Buddha and Kalki as one of three future manifestations, is followed by no immediate corrective in the style of 1.3.28. This is possibly because the teaching of Ṛṣabha's sons is intended to be seen as very ancient wisdom, delivered in a primordial age when Kṛṣṇa was such a remote figure on the far horizon of the future that his true significance could not yet be understood.

Although the *Viṣṇu* contains no list, in the strict sense, of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, Kṛṣṇa is mentioned as one of Śrï's partners at 1.9.144, together with Vāmana, Rāma Bhārgava and Rāma Rāghava. The names Govinda and Keśava appear in the protective formula used by Nanda in 5.5.14–21 (v.18).[22] In neither of these contexts is the name Kṛṣṇa singled out or stressed in any way.

Kṛṣṇa as the focal point of the series

The most obvious way of giving prominence to Kṛṣṇa is to tell his story at greater length than any of the other stories. In *Bhāgavata* 2.7.1–38 almost all the avatāras are described in one verse each

(although Rāma Dāśarathi has three, 2.7.23–5), but Kṛṣṇa's exploits are related in ten verses (2.7.26–35). As in *Hv* 31.143–7, Kṛṣṇa is described mainly as the victor over many *asuras*, but this is not simply a list of his conquered opponents. In 2.7.27–33 his gracious acts on behalf of the cowherd community are described in some detail, so that Kṛṣṇa stands out from the other avatāra figures in the list.

However, there are more subtle ways of focusing the list upon Kṛṣṇa. One of them has already been noted in connection with the *prādurbhāva* list of *Hv* 31. All three texts use the device of incorporating an *avatāra* list into praises addressed to Kṛṣṇa himself, or into a speech or a train of thought which is centred upon him, even though it does not contain his name. In *Hv* 65.36–44, for example, Kaṃsa gives the Yādava leaders a list of Viṣṇu's manifestations. He recalls how Viṣṇu has been Vāmana (v.36) and Narasimha (v.37). For the destruction of Tripura he 'assumed the inconceivable form of a white rock' (*acintyaṃ rūpam āsthāya śvetaśailasya*, v.38), which fell upon the Daityas and killed them.[23] He has been Bhārgava (v.39).[24] He is 'the eternal Lord Ananta' (*anantah śāśvato devah*, v.40). He raised the earth from the cosmic ocean as Varāha (v.40). He has taken the form of a woman (v.41), and of a tortoise (*akūpāra*, v.42). He has divided himself fourfold to become Dasaratha's sons (v.43). In this list Kṛṣṇa is not mentioned, but it is his triumphs over *asuras* from Pūtanā to Arista (65.26–31) which bring Viṣṇu's manifestations to Kaṃsa's mind. So here again Kṛṣṇa is the focal point of an avatāra list which in itself does not appear at first sight to emphasise his importance in any way.

The *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* also furnish examples of this device. Expressing Akrūra's anticipatory thoughts about his meeting with Kṛṣṇa, *Viṣṇu* 5.17.10 describes the latter as 'that unborn one who has maintained the world in forms such as those of fish, tortoise, boar, horse and lion' (*matsyakūrmavarāhāśvasimharūpādibhiḥ sthitim / cakāra jagato yo 'jaḥ* …). *Bhāgavata* 10.2.40 and 10.40.17–22 are also lists in which the name of Kṛṣṇa does not occur (although the names of the *vyūhas* appear at 10.40.21), but which are addressed to him by the gods and by Akrūra respectively.

Kṛṣṇa as the source of the series

There is one point in the narrative as presented by both the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* where there is a hint that Kṛṣṇa should be seen as the source of all the manifestations rather than as one among others. In the *Harivaṃśa*, when Akrūra is musing upon Kṛṣṇa's true nature after meeting him for the first time, he thinks:

36 And today I shall honour his dwelling with the appropriate rites, and I shall honour him as Viṣṇu with *mantras* in my mind, 37 and although I recognise him as a kinsman, and his manifestations are among men, I know that he is more than human, as others [know] who possess the divine eye (36 *ahaṃ tv asyādya vasatiṃ pūjayiṣye yathāvidhi / viṣṃutvaṇ manasā caiva pūjayiṣyāmi mantravat // 37 yac ca jāt;iparijñānaṃ prādurbhavāś ca vai nR̥ ṣu / amānuṣaṃ vedmi cainaṃ ye cānye divyacakṣuṣaḥ // Hv* 68.36–7)

The use of the plural *prādurbhāvāś* may mean that Akrūra has in mind other manifestations which have emanated from this Kṛṣṇa whom he knows to be 'more than human'.[25] 5.17.10 in the *Viṣṇu*'s veṚṣion of this episode, which has just been mentioned, could also be taken to mean that Kṛṣṇa is the source, and not only the focal point of the series. Again, in *Viṣṇu* 5.20.92, immediately after killing Kaṃsa, Kṛṣṇa and his brother reverence their parents, and Vasudeva responds by praising Kṛṣṇa in exalted terms. As part of this eulogy he says:

Have mercy, supreme lord; protect the universe by the descended portions which you create. You are no son of mine (*sa tvaṃ prasïda parameśvara pāhi viśvam aṃśāvatārakaraṇair na mamāsi putraḥ //* 5.20.103a)

There is an implied contrast here between Kṛṣṇa and the aṃsāvatāras which he brings into being.

In the *Bhāgavata*, the identification in 1.3 between Kṛṣṇa and the Cosmic Man who gives rise to all the *avatāras* emphasises this idea even more strongly, as does the verse which precedes the list of 10.40.17–22. Here Akrūra addresses Kṛṣṇa as one who assumes forms, and not as a form which has been assumed:

Whatever forms you adopt for your amusement here, the worlds joyfully sing your fame because they remove sorrows (*yāni yānïha rūpāṇi krïḍanārthaṃ bibharṣi hi / tair amṚsta śuco lokā mudā gāyanti te yaśaḥ //* 10.40.16)

Bhāgavata 7.10.48–9 has already been quoted. By linking Narasiṃha with Kṛṣṇa rather than with Viṣṇu, it suggests that all the other *avatāras* should be similarly linked. Again, *Bhāgavata* 10.2.40, which is so like *Viṣṇu* 5.17.10, could also be taken to mean that Kṛṣṇa is the source of the forms which have been manifested, and in 11.13.19 Kṛṣṇa himself tells Uddhava that he once appeared to Brahmā in the form of a gander (*haṃsena rūpeṇa*).

Obviously, including Kṛṣṇa alongside the other figures within *avatāra* lists in no way prevents any of the three texts from presenting him in a far more exalted light than the list would at first sight suggest. Even in the *Harivaṃśa*, the overall context of Chapter 31's *prādurbhāva* list acts as a corrective to the brief and seemingly dismissive reference to Kṛṣṇa there, and the *Bhāgavata* ensures even more that no reader/hearer could mistake him for just one more avatāra figure. Kṛṣṇa here is not only acting out the human roles of cowherd boy, householder and warrior chief. He is even playing at

being an *avatāra*, allowing himself to be listed among the many and varied forms which he brings into being.

Kṛṣṇa and his brother

There is one figure from among the other *avatāras* which must be scrutinised more closely, since its relationship with Kṛṣṇa is at a different level. Whereas the others are linked with him only through the artificial device of the avatāra framework, this one is connected with him in a deeper way. He is Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Rāma, or Saṃkarṣaṇa to give him his more ancient name, and there is archaeological evidence that he and Kṛṣṇa were regarded as a pair at least as long ago as the second century BCE. [26] In all three texts he is said to be the son of Vasudeva and Devakï, but to have been transferred from Devakï's womb to her co-wife Rohiṇï's, and therefore born as the latter's son in the safety of Nanda's settlement rather than amid the dangers of Mathurā.[27]

In all three texts Kṛṣṇa and Rāma/Saṃkarṣaṇa are presented as a complementary pair. In its description of them as small boys in 51.1–12, the *Harivaṃśa* speaks of them as 'having formed a unity even from their earliest years' (*bālyād evaikatāṃ gatau*, v.2), and as 'one body divided in two … sharing in a single childhood' (*ekadehau dvidhā kṚtau … ekasya śiśutāṃ gatau*, v.4). They are:

> Both the one measure of the worlds, both human beings whose actions are divine, the pastors of the whole universe transformed into cowherd boys (*ekapramāṇau lokānāṃ devavṚttāntamānuṣau / kṚtsnasya jagato gopau saṃvṚttau gopadārakau* // 51.5)

The *Viṣṇu* suggests at times that Kṛṣṇa and his brother together make up a dual revelation of the Supreme God. Nārāyaṇa sends his 'two white and black hairs' (*keśau sitakṚ ṣ ṇau*, 5.1.59–60) to earth, and when Akrūra comes to VṚndāvana he recognises the two boys as 'this aspect of the Lord Vāsudeva present in two forms' (*bhagavadvāsudevāṃśo dvidhā yo 'yaṃ vyavasthitaḥ* // 5.17.26b).[28]

Nevertheless, both the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* give Kṛṣṇa a definite priority over his brother. The Kāliya and Pralamba episodes (*Hv* 55–6,58; *Viṣṇu* 5.7,9) are presented as companion pieces, in which first one brother, then the other, is drawn into an adventure on his own, but needs the other's presence in order to ensure success. Yet Kṛṣṇa is without Saṃkarṣaṇa because he has chosen to be, whereas Pralamba has found a means of drawing Saṃkarṣaṇa involuntarily away from Kṛṣṇa.[29] Kṛṣṇa becomes involved with the *nāga* Kāliya out of a desire to defend the community, whereas Saṃkarṣaṇa is simply concerned to preserve himself from Pralamba. Kṛṣṇa is silent when caught in the serpent's coils, whereas Saṃkarṣaṇa cries out for his

brother's help.[30]

Again, the *Harivaṃśa* marks out Kṛṣṇa alone as a king, however much he may deny in 78.33–6 that he has any desire for sovereignty. Not only does Nārada prophesy kingship for him after his defeat of Keśin (67.65), but there are verses which credit Kṛṣṇa with the royal power of 'making the *yuga*'[31] by transforming the present age into the stability and prosperity of the *kṚtayuga*. Thus when Akrūra arrives at Nanda's encampment, he thinks of Kṛṣṇa thus:

> Under his authority the whole world will become constantly stable, its enemies defeated on all sides, prosperous as in the kṚtayuga (*asyedaṃ śāsane sarvaṃ jagat sthāsyati śāśvatam / nihatāmitrasāmantaṃ sphïtaṃ kṚtayuge yathā* // 68.30)

When Kṛṣṇa returns to Mathurā from the house of his preceptor Sāndïpani, the joyful effect which this has upon the city includes the fact that 'signs which appeared in the world's kṚtayuga of old were all seen …' (*yāni liṅgāni lokasya babhuḥ krtayuge purā / tāni sarvāṇy* …, 79.35). The *Viṣṇu* gives priority to Kṛṣṇa by suggesting that Rāma should be identified with Śesa rather than directly with Viṣṇu. It stresses the complementarity of the brothers in the Kāliya and Pralamba episodes even more strongly than does the *Harivaṃśa*, by balancing against each other the words of encouragement which the two brothers speak. Rāma begins to Kṛṣṇa:

> What is this, O supreme God of gods? You are going too far in manifesting this human condition. Do you not know that you are eternal?[32] (*kim idaṃ devadeveśa bhāvo 'yaṃ mānuṣas tvayā / vyajyate 'tyantam ātmānaṃ kim anantaṃ na vetsi y at* // 5.7.35)

And Kṛṣṇa to Rāma:

> Why have you entered so obviously into this human condition, [you] the Universal Self, the most secret self of all secrets? (*kim ayaṃ mānuṣyo bhāvo vyaktam evāvalambyate*[33] */ sārvatman sarvaguhyānāxṃ guhyaguhyātmanā tvayā* // 5.9.23)

Yet in spite of this apparent balance and equality between the two, Kṛṣṇa's speech addresses itself mainly to identifying Rāma with Śesa, the world's upholder and destroyer (5.9.28–31).

In the *Bhāgavata* Rāma is often subordinated to his brother in stories of their boyhood. Kṛṣṇa is said to be *balānvita* (10.15.2; 10.26.10), *sabala* (10.19.8; 10.20.25), *saharāma* (10.19.15) or *sarāma* (10.23.17; 10.26.8), *saṃkarṣaṇānvita* (10.20.29).[34] Yet there are still places in *Bhāgavata* 10 where Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are said to be a complementary pair. In the account of Akrūra's arrival in VṚndāvana they are described as:

> Bala and Keśava, the primordial puruṣa and *pradhāna*, the world's causes, the world's leaders, who have each manifested an aspect of themselves by descending for the world's sake (*pradhānapuruṣāv ādyau jagaddhetū jagatpatï / avatïrṇau jagatyarthe svāṃśena balakeśavau* // 10.38.32; cf. 10.38.15)

This idea is featured again at various points in the narrative. Uddhava tells Nanda that 'these two are the seed and matrix of the universe: Rāma and Mukunda, *purusa* and *pradhāna*' (*etau hi viśvasya ca bïjayonï rāmo mukundaḥ puruṣaḥ pradhānam*, 10.46.31a). Akrūra later hails Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in Mathurā:

> You are *pradhāna* and *purusa*, world-causing and world-constituting; without you there is neither higher nor lower (*yuvāṃ pradhānapuruṣau jagaddhetū jaganmayau / bhavadbhyāṃ na vinā kiṃcit param asti na cāparam //* 10.48.18)

Vasudeva greets his sons as 'the supreme *pradhāna* and *puruṣa* in person' (*sākṣāt pradhānapuruṣau parau*, 10.85.3). As in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu*, however, this equality is denied as strongly as it is stated. Uddhava and Akrūra are portrayed as undoubtedly devoted to Kṛṣṇa alone, not to the two brothers together, and no sooner has Vasudeva greeted his sons as *sākṣāt pradhānapuruṣau parau* than in the very next verse he calls Kṛṣṇa 'the Lord in person who is ruler of *pradhāna* and *puruṣa*' (… *bhagavān sākṣāt pradhānapuruṣeśvaraḥ*, 10.85.4).

It has already been remarked apropos of the *Harivaṃśa* that this relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his brother is reminiscent of that between Viṣṇu and Śiva.[35] At a point in the *Viṣṇu* when Kṛṣṇa himself confronts Śiva directly (5.33.39–49), a similar note is struck: Kṛṣṇa reminds Śiva that they are both identical with each other (v.48), but only after Śiva has acknowledged him as 'Hari the Supreme Being, the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Self without beginning or end' (… *puruṣottamam / pareśam paramātmānam anādinidhanaṃ harim //* v.41). When this conversation is retold in *Bhāgavata* 10.63.34–45 Śiva simply speaks as Kṛṣṇa's *bhakta* who, along with other celestial beings, has taken refuge with him. Thus, even if Rāma/Saṃkarṣaṇa is equated with Śiva, this gives him at best only an ambivalent kind of equality with Kṛṣṇa, not full parity.

There is, in fact, no serious claim in any of the three texts that any other *avatāra* is to be regarded as Kṛṣṇa's true equal. He may be regarded as subordinate to Viṣṇu in some way — his earthly counterpart in the *Harivaṃśa*, or his aṃśāṃśa in the *Viṣṇu* — but he is always seen as revealing the Supreme God more fully and more immediately than any other manifestation. In all three texts there is a sense in which 'Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself', whenever he is compared with any other human being, or indeed with any other divine being except Viṣṇu himself. Only in the *Bhāgavata*, however, are those words taken in their most absolute sense. Kṛṣṇa's story is presented there in such a way as to transcend the *avatāra* framework in which it has been set, so that he is proclaimed unambiguously as the Supreme Reality.

Finally the question must be asked: what difference does it make whether one sees the Supreme Reality as Viṣṇu or as Kṛṣṇa? To some the answer would seem obvious. Viṣṇu stands for order and stability, the protection of *dharma;* his role as the one who assumes *avatāras* makes him 'the cosmic policeman of the Hindu pantheon', to use David Kinsley's phrase.[36] By contrast Kṛṣṇa is all playful spontaneity; his *bhaktas* may be able to depend upon his grace but they will be continually surprised by his unpredictability. This may be a valid contrast if one is thinking of Kṛṣṇa as he is presented in Vaiṣṇava devotional poems, such as those of Sūr Dās, which portray his childhood.[37] But in the *Bhāgavata*'s rendering of his story, the young Kṛṣṇa is not specially remarkable for his spontaneity. Certainly he plays and gets into mischief (10.8.21–31; 10.9.1–12; 10.12.1–10), but where his major exploits are concerned, his behaviour is characterised by deliberation rather than by spontaneity. Even at the earliest stage of his childhood, this is evident. He uproots the *arjuna* trees after reflecting on the fact that they are *guhyakas* who have been cursed by Nārada (10.10.25). Before entering Agha's mouth he pauses to think about what he should do (10.12.28). At later stages, his detachment from the *gopīs*, and the didactic tone which he takes with them and with his wives, have already been noted.

It is not so much Kṛṣṇa's spontaneity which is important for the *Bhāgavata* as the fact that he presents himself as the giver of mokṣa under the guise of precisely those elements in life which at first sight seem inimical to its attainment: as child, lover and householder. The *Bhāgavata* itself declares that these elements represent an involvement with this world which prevents the attainment of *mokṣa*. The allegory of the forest in 5.13–14 depicts the life of the householder as a continuous impediment to spiritual progress. When Prahlāda is teaching the other *asura* boys in 7.6 he deplores 'the twenty [years which] elapse in childhood folly and boyhood play' (*mugdhasya bālye kaumāre krīḍato yāti viṃsatiḥ* / v. 7a), the attachments of householder life (v.9), and especially affection for wife and children (v. 11). Kṛṣṇa's message to Uddhava incorporates a passage which is introduced as Pururavas' lament for having been so long obsessed with Urvaśī (11.26.7–24).

Yet in presenting Kṛṣṇa as child, lover and householder, the *Bhāgavata* offers to the hearer/reader a way to renounce the world while enjoying it, by joining with the Lord in the cosmic play in which he is for ever involved, yet from which he is for ever detached. The Viṣṇu who creates and maintains the universe of the *Viṣṇu* may be within all beings, guiding and informing the cosmos at its deepest levels, but he does not offer a personal intimacy with each individual.

He may appear to devotees like Dhruva and Prahlāda to comfort and uphold them, but his form is that of a royal warrior, and his action is that of a king bestowing boons upon a subject. When the Supreme Reality is seen as Kṛṣṇa rather than as Viṣṇu, a new warmth comes into human life, and a new dignity is conferred upon human relationships. They must still be transcended, if Kṛṣṇa is to be all in all, but they need not be dismissively rejected.

INTEGRITY AND CREATIVITY

Just as the texts present Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu in a variety of perspectives, so modern scholarship has adopted a variety of approaches to the texts themselves. Some of them were mentioned briefly on page 11, where it was remarked that the Purānas have rarely been treated as integrated texts. Yet I believe that they were produced as integrated texts, originally composed orally and recited in public performance, and even when written down (as the *Bhāgavata* may have been from the start) still intended for public recital over a period of days, so that their hearers could experience the text in its entirety No doubt the length and precise contents of a text varied from one occasion to another, according to the needs and interests of a particular audience. No doubt those in the audience remembered their own favourite passages rather than keeping the text as a whole in mind.[38] But it was the text as a whole that they came to hear; they did not spend their listening time separating out *dharmaśāstra* from narrative, or history from myth; they were caught up in the flow of the recital, the dialogue between the interlocutors, sharing the questioner's desire to know whatever the narrator could tell them.

Clearly, the scholar approaches a text in a different spirit from that of the listener who is seeking information and/or entertainment. Yet the Purāṇas are texts which have a life outside the world of scholarship. They do not, as it were, lie passively beneath one's hand, waiting for orderly patterns to be imposed upon them. They have their own patterns, their own order, not always immediately visible to those who approach them from the distance of another age and culture, but there nevertheless, the product of selection, arrangement and rearrangement of older units. In illuminating some of the processes of selection, arrangement and rearrangement which have taken place in the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata*, I have endeavoured to show that there is true creativity at work here: that the Harivaṃśa's selection and use of its material in Chapters 30–45, the *Viṣṇu's* arrangement of the *pañcalakṣaṇa* and *bhuvanavinyāsa* material to build up its picture of Viṣṇu/*brahman's* cosmos, and the Bhāgavata's rearrangement of the *Viṣṇu s* patterns, are all examples of

'creative compilation', not 'mere compilation'. Part of this creativity consists in finding new ways in which various elements in the material may be related to the text as a whole. Chapter 7 has shown how a full understanding of each *Kṛṣṇacarita* depends upon taking into account its relation to the whole.

As a final demonstration of my theories concerning the integrity of the text and creative compilation, I should like to use two narratives which appear in different versions and in different contexts in each text. The first is the story of Varāha (*Hv* 31.21–30; *Viṣṇu* 1.4; *Bhāgavata* 3.13–19); the second is a story to which it is difficult to give an overall name, since its centre changes from one purāṇa to the other: in the *Harivaṃśa* it concerns the Daitya king Hiraṇyakaśipu and Viṣṇu's manifestation as Narasiṃha (*Hv* 31.31–67); in the *Viṣṇu* it is about HiraÑyakaśipu, his son Prahlāda, and Viṣṇu in his own supreme form (*Viṣṇu* 1.17–20);[39] in the *Bhāgavata* HiraÑyakaśipu, Prahlāda and Narasiṃha all play prominent parts (*Bhāgavata* 7.1–10.51).

To begin with the Varāha story and ***Hv* 31.21–30**, this is part of the *prādurbhāva* list which is common to *Hv* 31 and Brahmā 213.10–170, and was probably originally a 'mini-purāna'.[40] Here it is used to provide Vaiśaṃpāyana's answer to Janamejaya's request for information about Viṣṇu's manifestations. Varāha is second in the list. 31.22–7 is a description of the Boar as symbolising the Vedic sacrifice,[41] and it is only in vv28–30 that he is described as saving the earth from the cosmic flood. Comparison with the corresponding Brahmā passage suggests that the *Harivaṃśa* has not attempted to modify its source, but is simply using this *prādurbhāva* list as a means of opening up Janamejaya's question in 30.1–8 so that it no longer refers to Viṣṇu's appearance as Kṛṣṇa alone, but to his innumerable manifestations (31.10), of which only a few examples can be given here.

The *Viṣṇu s veRṣion* of the Varāha story, ***Viṣṇu* 1.4**, has a completely diferent context. It is plainly presented as part of the *purāna's* cosmogony, being told between the account of the measurement of time in 1.3, which leads into it by a reference to the present *kalpa* being called Varāha (1.3.28), and that of Brahmā's various creations in 1.5. There is more emphasis here upon the raising of the earth, although the sacrificial symbolism still plays a part in this story (w31–4). Indeed, it is a part which is typical of the *Viṣṇu*, since it is included in a hymn of praise which is sung by the divine Ṛṣi*s* who see the earth being raised (vv31–44). The earth itself is personified as a woman, who also praises Nārāyaṇa[42] as he draws her from the water (vvl2–25).

The references to Nārāyaṇa as identified with Brahmā in 4.1,2,4,5

indicate that the *Viṣṇu* found this as an ancient story, handed down from days when Brahmā, rather than Viṣṇu, was regarded as the supreme creator and saviour. It is certainly a story which features in other *purāṇas.*[43] However, the *Viṣṇu* uses it to heighten its picture of Viṣṇu as adored by the whole universe, and even inserts within it, in Earth's eulogy, one of its warnings against mistaking God's lower manifestations for his highest essence (*paraṃ tattvam*, 1.4.17). This connects the story with the other verses in which the same point is made (1.19.79–80, 5.7.67, 5.9.28), and with one of the central themes of the whole text: that Viṣṇu has many forms in which he guides and sustains the universe and inspires his worshippers, and yet in his identity with *brahman* he transcends them all, and indeed transcends the universe itself. So here is an example of how the *Viṣṇu* stamps its theology upon an already existing story.

In ***Bhāgavata* 3.13–19** the Varāha myth appears again in the context of creation, in that part of the purāṇa which acknowledges its debt to the *Viṣṇu* by making Maitreya its narrator. It is treated much more extensively than in the *Viṣṇu*. In fact there are two tellings of the Varāha story here (3.13 and 3.18–19), with a link between them which also connects them to other parts of the *purāṇa*. 3.13 begins with Manu Svāyambhuva asking Brahmā to raise the earth from the cosmic waters, so that the human race may have a place to live (3.13.14–15). While Brahmā is pondering how to do this, a tiny boar drops from his nostril and begins to grow to a tremendous size.[44] He recognises this as 'the Lord whose being is sacrifice' (*bhagavān yajñapuruṣo*, 3.13.23), who proceeds to pull the earth from the underworld, easily killing a Daitya who tries to oppose him. Then, as in *Viṣṇu* 1.4, he is praised by the Ṛṣis (3.13.34–45).

Vidura's questions about this Daitya lead towards the second telling of the story, this time from the point of view of Hiraṇyākṣa, the Daitya in question. 3.14–17 tells the story of his birth, together with his twin brother HiraÑyakaśipu, to Kaśyapa and Diti, and also explains the reason for their birth. As Jaya and Vijaya, the two were once the doorkeepers of Vaikuṇṣha, and were cursed to spend three lives as Viṣṇu's enemies.[45] Only three deaths at Viṣṇu's hands can restore them to their former position. Thus 3.18 opens with Hiraṇyākṣa defying the Boar as he rescues the earth. A fight with maces ensues. Hiraṇyākṣa goes on to use magic powers, but all is to no avail, and he falls to a blow from his opponent (3.19.26). Brahmā and others remind each other (and the audience of the *purāṇd*) that eventually this Daitya and his brother will be restored to their former state (3.19.29).

To compare the three Varāha stories, that given by the *Harivaṃśa* is

brief and unexciting. It is the *prādurbhāva* list as a whole which is important here, not this particular story. The *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* not only enhance the story's interest by telling it at greater length — and in the Bhāgavata's case with a wealth of exciting detail — but also treat it in such a way as to make it significant for the whole text. The *Viṣṇu* uses it to express Viṣṇu's transcendence over a worshipping cosmos. The *Bhāgavata* uses it as the beginning of the story of Jaya and Vijaya, which runs from here to 10.78.10[46] and explores a theme which is connected with its portrayal of Kṛṣṇa as the victor over all hostile powers who liberates even his enemies. Hiraṇyākṣa will end his third life at Kṛṣṇa's hands, but even at this stage he is on his way towards liberation. [47]

The other story is well-known as the subject of Hacker's monograph *Prahlāda*, although in ***Hv* 31.31–67** this character does not appear. The Daitya HiraŇyakaśipu (here unconnected with Hiraṇyāksa, who makes no appearance in the *Harivaṃśa* tradition until the Varāha story is retold in the Vulgate veRṣion of the *Bhaviṣyaparvan*)[48] obtains by long and fierce asceticism the gift of virtual invincibility: he cannot be killed by any known species of creature or by any kind of weapon or any other means. The alarmed gods are reassured by Brahmā that Viṣṇu will kill HiraŇyakaśipu (v. 52), but the latter seems nevertheless to be all-powerful, living in heaven (v. 56) and excluding the gods from the sacrifices which he and his fellow *asuras* offer on earth. Eventually Viṣṇu assumes the form of a man-lion (thus putting himself outside the range of the creatures specified in Brahmā's boon) and kills HiraŇyakaśipu (vv65–7). Again the *Harivaṃśa* appears to be using this story simply as one of Viṣṇu's innumerable manifestations, without any particular stress upon it.

In ***Viṣṇu* 1.17–20** the man-lion is out of sight. The story relates the struggle between HiraŇyakaśipu and his son Prahlāda. No details of Brahmā's boon are given, but it is said that by means of it HiraŇyakaśipu has usurped all authority in the triple world (1.17.2). The tyrant is disconcerted, however, when he asks Prahlāda to tell him what he has learned in his studies, and the boy tells him that he has learned to adore Viṣṇu (1.17.14–15), claiming moreover to have learned this lesson from Viṣṇu himself. Nothing that HiraŇyakaśipu can say or do will shake his son from this position. He has him bitten by snakes, trampled and gored by elephants, thrown upon a fire, poisoned, attacked by various forms of magic, and finally trapped under the sea. But even here Prahlāda continues to praise Viṣṇu, who at last appears to him and grants him boons, including forgiveness for his father (1.20.24). The story ends with the reconciliation of father and son (1.20.30–1), followed by the verse which mentions in passing

HiraÑyakaśipu's death at Narasiṃha's claws.

This version of the story, focused upon Prahlāda rather than upon HiraÑyakaśipu, appears to be the *Viṣṇu*'s own invention, in which 'the stroke of near genius which allows Prahlāda to appear as a child'[49] puts devotion to Viṣṇu in a new light. The story follows the episodes of Dhruva (1.11–12) and Prthu (1.13), and possibly draws some motifs from both of them: from Dhruva the idea of a child devotee, [50] who turns to Viṣṇu for protection and guidance, and clings resolutely to him in spite of fears and sufferings (1.12.12–30); from Prthu the contrast between an arrogant and tyrannical father (1.13.13–29) and a devout and righteous son (1.13.47–64). Prahlāda becomes the model devotee for the whole *purāṇa*, thus emphasising the *Viṣṇu s* point that Viṣṇu himself, rather than Kṛṣṇa, is the chief focus for the worship of the cosmos. His appearance to Prahlāda is the culmination of a whole series of saving appearances, not in any assumed form but in his own form.[51] It is this 'highest form' (*param rūpam*, 1.19.80) which the story of Prahlāda encourages Viṣṇu's *bhaktas* to seek, so that at this point it links up with the Varāha story which proclaims the same message.

Viṣṇu 1.17–20 connects also with the other story, in 3.17–18, which appears to be the *Viṣṇu's* own invention: Viṣṇu's deception of the *asuras* by appearing in heretical forms.[52] As was seen in the first chapter, the *Viṣṇu*'s Prahlāda story also shows evidence that the purāṇa is presenting its own teaching as equal, or even superior, to that of the Buddhists. Viṣṇu's devotees exhibit the major Buddhist virtues; they can realise nirvāṇa through his grace.[53]

The story in ***Bhāgavata* 7.1–10.51** arises from a question from Parīkṣit about the Lord's impartiality. Śuka tells him of the conversation between Yudhiṣṣhira and Nārada in which a similar question arose after Kṛṣṇa's killing of Śiśupāla: why did he receive liberation from this death, when the death of Vena, no more evil a king than Śiśupāla, brought only condemnation? Nārada's answer to this involves him in retelling the story of Jaya and Vijaya in 7.2. As Hiraṇyākṣa was Vijaya, so his brother HiraÑyakaśipu was Jaya. Then Nārada goes on to tell Prahlāda's story, beginning with Hiraṇyakaśipu's grief at his brother's death. It is this which causes HiraÑyakaśipu to seek from Brahmā the boons of invincibility and universal sovereignty. The *Bhāgavata* stresses that Prahlāda is not only, as in the *Viṣṇu*, a great devotee of Viṣṇu, but also an extremely virtuous boy (7.4). The story develops along similar lines to that in the *Viṣṇu*, but here the climax comes at HiraÑyakaśipu's court: on being told by Prahlāda that Hari is omnipresent, his father mockingly asks him why he is not seen in this pillar (7.8.13). Narasiṃha emerges from the pillar and kills the Daitya king. Prahlāda and all the gods

worship him.

The *Bhāgavata*'s context for this story is quite different from that of the *Viṣṇu*. Prahlāda and HiraÑyakaśipu are both presented as unlikely recipients of the Lord's grace, following the examples of Ajāmila (6.1–3) and VṚtra (6.7–17). Prahlāda has received the grace to be a *mahābhāgavata*, while HiraÑyakaśipu has grace shown to him in drawing nearer to his restoration as Jaya in Vaikuṇṣha. This is in contrast to the Viṣṇu's *veRṣion* of the story, where grace is offered to HiraÑyakaśipu through Prahlāda's forgiveness, not through the manner of his death.

For the most part the *Bhāgavata* combines the *Viṣṇu*'s version of the story with the traditional version presented in *Hv* 31. On the one hand it uses the traditional scenario of Narasiṃha's killing of HiraÑyakaśipu, and on the other hand it retains the *Viṣṇu*'s innovation of portraying Prahlāda as a child. But here Prahlāda is not the chief devotee of the whole text, but one of several who have been *mahābhāgavatas* since their earliest youth, worshipping the Lord at the age of five. [54] Moreover, by suggesting that Narasiṃha is a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa rather than of Viṣṇu[55], *Bhāgavata* 7.10.48–9. and 7.15.75–6 obliterate the stroke by which the *Viṣṇu* made *bhakti* centre upon Viṣṇu rather than Kṛṣṇa.

The *Bhāgavata* retains the Viṣṇu's picture of Prahlāda as a teacher, instructing the other youthful *asuras*. Indeed this picture has more resonance here than in the *Viṣṇu*, since it connects with the other passages scattered about the text, which present the ancient *bhāgavatadharma*, culminating in the teaching which Kṛṣṇa himself gives to Uddhava in Book 11. The *Bhāgavata*'s version of the story, springing as it does out of discussions about the Lord's treatment of his enemies, also contributes to the overall teaching which the *purāṇa* gives, and has links with other similar passages (e.g. 3.2.24; 8.22.6; 11.5.48).

Thus, the treatment of both these stories by the three texts is something which can be appreciated only when the latter are approached as wholes. Even in Hacker's valuable work on the second of them, points are missed because what is being compared is successive versions of the story alone, in isolation from the whole text of which it forms part. What is more, some of the points which Hacker makes about the *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata* versions of the story apply to each *purāṇa* as a whole and not simply to the Prahlāda episode.[56] When the texts are seen as wholes their creativity is more plainly displayed, as well as the way in which the *Bhāgavata* counteracts the *Viṣṇu*'s innovations and theological patterns.

The objection could be made, of course, that the three texts which are the subject of this study are not typical of the purāṇic genre as a whole, but particularly unified compositions. Even so, whether one sees *purāṇas* as wholes or as collections of fragments depends largely on what one is expecting to see. In writing of the core material shared by the Brahmāṇḍa and the *Vāyu*, Kirfel pointed out that it gives a coherently organised description of the universe's extent in time and space.[57] If the additions which the two *purāṇas* have each made to this basic pattern were seen as variations which were appropriate to the situation of each text, this would allow them to be seen as unified compositions rather than as collections of miscellaneous information, randomly attached to an all-important traditional core.

Another *purāṇa* which may be more coherently organised than has so far been realised is the *Mārkaṇḍeya*. When Pargiter translated it, he saw it as five separate collections of material which had been brought together for no particular reason. [58] Yet a more integrated view of the text is possible, since one characteristic of the *Mārkaṇḍeya* is an emphasis upon the role of women. Each one of the five collections identified by Pargiter contributes to this theme. In the first (Chapters 1–9) two of the four questions which are asked concern Draupadï (1.14, 5.1–26; 1.16, 7.1–69). In the second (10–44), the story of Dattātreya begins by explaining how his mother Anasūyā came to claim a boon from the gods by persuading a dissolute brahmin's loyal wife to remove her ban from the sunrise which would bring with it her husband's death (16.14–90); Dattātreya's victory over the Daityas comes about through his wife, who is said to be Lakṣmï (18.35–58); Madalasā's teaching of her son is given at length (25–35). [59] In the third section (45–81) women are less prominent, but there are discussions about the married state (65.7–26; 69.52–61). The fourth section (82–92) is the *Devïmāhātmya*, the celebration of the Goddess's triumph over *asuras* whom she alone can defeat, while the fifth (93–136) contains stories about the finding and losing of wives (113–16; 122–7). Pargiter referred to the *Devïmāhātmya* as ‘a pure interpolation’,[60] but it is, to say the least, an interesting coincidence that this glorification of God as female should have been inserted into a text which was already so concerned with women.

The present study will have lasting value if it helps to persuade other scholars to approach the Purāṇas as integrated texts, and to look in them for signs of creative compilation. Such an approach may not uncover patterns and structures everywhere. There may still be some passages which are hard to account for as part of an intelligible whole. But I believe that these would be far fewer than many today would expect — far too few to contradict the new picture which would

emerge of the Purāṇas as bearers of world-views and value systems which have been carefully constructed by the arrangement and rearrangement of the traditional material which they hold in common.

CONCLUSION

I hope that it is now clear that Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu are certainly both contenders for the title of Supreme God. Kṛṣṇa is not simply one of Viṣṇu's manifestations whose status has been elevated by some long process of deification over the centuries. As the *Bhagavadgītā* shows, from relatively early days he was recognised as divine in his own right, and not merely by association with Viṣṇu. Like Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa made his own contribution to the composite figure of the Vaiṣḥavas' God, not least by his interventions in the universe, motivated by his concern for *dharma*.

Yet unlike Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa never became completely merged with Viṣṇu, just one more of his names. This was because of the very qualities which led to his apparently lower status as one of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*. His human characteristics and the eventful story of his human life meant that however often he might be identified with Viṣṇu he could never be completely equated with him in a way which allowed no sort of remainder. The *avatāra* framework distanced Kṛṣṇa from Viṣṇu as much as it identified the two. The space which it created between them allowed the figure of Kṛṣṇa to develop in its own way and attract its own worshippers, and also allowed the possibility of his gaining the ascendancy over Viṣṇu, as he does in the *Bhāgavata*.

Indeed, the *avatāra* framework allowed much more flexibility than might have seemed likely at first sight. It took several centuries for the present-day list of ten to become standard, as the varying lists in the *Bhāgavata* indicate, and there is nothing in the three texts to suggest that any of them played any part in the process of standardisation. By leaving the list as open-ended as possible, the Vaiṣṇava brahmins who produced these texts made it easier to play about with it and to see Kṛṣṇa as the God beyond it all, with his brother Rāma so close to him as to provide an acceptable substitute for him as the eighth member of the list.[61] The substitution of Kṛṣṇa for Viṣṇu as the source of the *avatāras* has no precise parallel, so far as I am aware, in the history of the figure of Rāma Dāśarathi, who otherwise shares Kṛṣṇa's dual status of Supreme God and subordinate manifestation.

As was stated on page 182, 'the *Viṣṇu* proclaims Viṣṇu as supreme, and the *Bhāgavata* asserts the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa'. These two perspectives provided the starting point for two different styles of

Vaiṣṇavism: the Srïvaisnavism of South India, which focused its worship upon Viṣṇu and his consort Śrï, and the Kṛṣṇaite Vaiṣṇavism of the North, focused upon Kṛṣṇa. This twofold development has never constituted a doctrinal problem of the kind so well-known in early Christianity. Such problems arise when arguments are brought together in confrontation, but in the Purāṇas such confrontation never arises: instead they tell another story, or add another twist to one already told. The *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* both make their distinctive appeal to the imagination of their hearers/readers, who can perceive themselves as living in a universe where either Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa alone is supreme. Yet neither attempts to exclude the divine figure who is not supreme. The *Viṣṇu* makes room for Kṛṣṇa as a special instance of Viṣṇu's all-pervading presence, while the *Bhāgavata*'s Kṛṣṇa-shaped cosmos contains Viṣṇu within it. The sixteenth century life of Caitanya shows this great Kṛṣṇa-worshipper travelling in the South and conversing with Śrïvaiṣṇava teachers in a way which recognises that they have a common share in the Vaiṣṇava tradition.[62]

Each of the three texts has played a great part in shaping that tradition. The *Harivaṃśa* not only brought the cowherd Kṛṣṇa into the Vaiṣṇava mainstream, but by its imaginative yet realistic treatment of his story, with its combination of *vaiśya* and *kṣatriya* elements, ensured his universal appeal to worshippers at all levels of society. The *Viṣṇu* may now seem to be overshadowed by the *Bhāgavata*, but it has influenced Śrïvaiṣṇavism and the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Vedānta, and was almost certainly the inspiration for Rāmānuja's use of the relationship between self and body as an analogy of that between *brahman* and the universe.[63] Moreover, its firm identification of Viṣṇu with *brahman* meant that Vaiṣṇava language about the Supreme God had to be understood in the most ultimate sense, rather than being taken to refer simply to a mythical figure who was not fully transcendent.

The importance of the *Bhāgavata*'s contribution to the Vaiṣṇava tradition could hardly be stressed sufficiently. By incorporating the emotional *bhakti* of the South into the brāhmanical traditions of the North, it created a world-view which combined advaitic identity with *brahman* and eternal love and service for *bhagavān*, i.e. Kṛṣṇa, as two equally valid and ultimate forms of the goal for which worshippers could aim. It gave to Vaiṣṇavism its most powerful images of Kṛṣṇa as child and as lover, which were to inspire Sanskrit and vernacular poets for centuries to come, and which still attract worshippers today; yet at the same time it found room also for the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata*, both as warrior and as teacher. By its flexible handling of the *avatāra* myth, giving it a prominent place in its theology while

presenting it in a variety of versions, it allowed scope for the establishment of Kṛṣṇa's absolute supremacy over all other *avatāras*. As the basic scripture of the movements started by Caitanya and Vallabha in the sixteenth century, the *Bhāgavata* is indeed 'the mighty trunk'[64] of the tree of Vaiṣṇavism, with branches spreading far and wide today.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE

1

'Descent' is the primary meaning of *avatāra*, which is derived from 'to pass across or over, cross over (a river), sail across' (Monier-Williams 1956: 454), with the prefix *ava-*, 'off, away, down' (*Ibid.*: 96), so it is literally 'a crossing downwards'.

2

In the other version Kṛṣṇa does not appear and his brother Rāma (usually called Balarāma in such lists) occupies the eighth place.

3

Another of the ten *avatāras*, Rāma, also has this dual status of Supreme God and subordinate manifestation. In his case the path from the latter to the former has been charted by Frank Whaling in '*The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*': first the hero, compared with Indra; then the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu; then eventually Supreme God (Whaling 1980). This 'rise' has been challenged, however, by Sheldon Pollock: 'Far from being a later graft — the unchallenged view in the West from the time of Wilhelm von Schlegel onward — the divinity of Rāma is, I have argued, constitutive of the text' (Pollock 1993: 282).

4

Hardy 1990: 79. The concept of *bhagavān* will be discussed on p. 176. At this stage I wish merely to say that I have translated it throughout by 'Lord', partly in order to draw attention to its availability for use with the meaning 'God'. Other words of similar meaning (e.g. *īśvara, prabhu*) I have translated by 'lord'.

5

A study of Kṛṣṇa's status in these three texts appeared in 1984: Noel Sheth's *The Divinity of Kṛṣṇa*. Sheth's book differs from mine, however, in that he has focused upon the three *Kṛṣṇacaritas* rather than upon the texts as a whole, and that he has placed no emphasis upon Kṛṣṇa's relation to the other figures who are regarded as *avatāras*.

6

The *Harivaṃśa* is hard to classify, but it is possible to regard it, as J. N. Farquhar did, as '… one of the earliest and greatest of the Purāṇas …' (Farquhar 1967: 139; cf. Vaidya 1969: xxix). It is in fact called *apurāṇa* in *Mbh* 1.2.69a (*harivaṃsas tataḥ parva purāṇaṃ khilasaṃjñitam /*).

7

See V. Narayana Rao in Doniger 1993: 97.

8

Winternitz 1972: 545.

9

Brown 1985: 8.

10

The word comes from *vy√as* (to divide/separate). Vyāsa is the one who orginally divided out the mass of the original Veda as it was known to the gods into its four separate versions, more manageable for human beings (cf. *Matsya* 53.3–11; *Viṣṇu* 3.6.15; cf. *Brahmāṇḍa* 1.2.34.21; *Vāyu* 60.21). There are other references in Kane's *History of Dharmaśāstra* to passages in which the idea is set forward: *Brahmavaivarta* 1.2.56–7; *Nārada* 1.92.22fr.; 109.30–1.; *Skanda* 7.2.8fr.; *Brahmāṇḍa* 1.1.1.40–1; *Liṅga* 1.2.1–3; *Padma* 5.1.45–52; *Vāyu* 1.60–1 (Kane 1977: 829).

11

'The Hindu universe is a closed system, a "world-egg" with a rigid shell, so that nothing is ever "created" *ex nihilo;* rather, things are constantly rearranged, each put in its proper place …' (O'Flaherty 1975: 13).

12

An example of how a figure may be part of several such sequences is Paraśurāma: the *daśāvatāra* list presents him as one of Viṣṇu's saving manifestations; in the *Mahābhārata* he is a somewhat sinister presence in the background of the main narrative, associated with Śiva, and with the lore and gift of weapons; in the mythology of the Bhārgavas he is an embodiment of that family's powers.

13

'Like a kaleidoscope, the myths contain and constantly rearrange vivid episodes like bits of colored glass through which one sees one's own personal reality; never is the pattern quite the same twice over, never is it at rest' (O'Flaherty 1980: 376).

14

Rarigāvatarana occurs at *Mbh* 12.283.4 and *rarigāvatāraka* at *Mn* 4.215 and *YājñavalkyasmṚti* 1.161. André Couture develops the theme of Kṛṣṇa as an actor, but simply uses the word *raṅgāvataraṇa* in passing, without making any connection with the *avatāra* idea (Couture 1977: 317).

15

Whereas I have usually translated *deva* by 'god', I have hesitated to use 'demon' for *asura*, since this suggests an inherently evil being, whereas *asuras* are simply the gods' enemies, and in the perpetual warfare between them both sides are alike in their aims and nature. Moreover both sides have a common father, Kaśyapa. I have therefore left *asura* untranslated throughout.

16

Dharma is a notoriously difficult word to translate. Its derivation from √*dh*Ṛ gives it the basic meaning of 'that which is established or firm' (Monier-Williams 1956: 510). It embraces the ideas of 'law', 'justice', 'righteousness', 'duty' and 'religion' and indicates (as in the present context) a stability which, to be complete, must belong to the whole *trailohya*. Throughout most of this study I have left *dharma* untranslated.

17

Cf. *Śivapurāṇa* (*Śatarudrasaṃhitā*); *Devīmāhātmya* 11.40–55.

18

Geoffrey Parrinder speaks of the *avatāras* of Siva described in the *Liṅga* as 'pale copies of those of Viṣṇu' (Parrinder 1970: 89; cf. 127), and S. L. Kātre declares that 'to an average Hindu, an avatāra is necessarily that of Viṣṇu, to the extent that belief in an avatāra of Śiva, Kālī, etc., appears false or novel to him' (Kātre 1934: 39).

19

Cf. O'Flaherty 1973.

20

Dandekar 1979: 251, note 89; Eliot 1962 (Vol II): 136. It was probably Viṣṇu's Vedic pedigree which made his name that of the whole movement.

21

For an account of this process see Dandekar 1979: 232–63 (his summary of R. G. Bhandarkar's survey of Vaiṣṇavism, updated by his own comments).

22

For a survey of theories about the derivation of Visnu from √*viś* see Gonda 1969: 4, note 11.

23

There are only four hymns addressed to Viṣṇu alone in the *Rgveda* (1.154; 1.156; 7.99; 7.100) and two addressed to him in conjunction with Indra. This seems very little when compared with the corresponding figures of 246 alone and 45 jointly with

some other god for Indra, or 195 and 17 for Agni.

24

ṚV 1.154.4; 7.99.3.

25

ṚV 1.22.19; 1.61.7; 2.22.1; 5.87.4; 6.69.7; 9.63.3; 10.99.2. Dandekar thinks that this association with Indra was stressed in order to give Viṣṇu, an indigenous vegetation god, a place in the Vedic pantheon (Dandekar 1979: 19,250).

26

E.g. ṚV 1.22.17; 3.54.14; 4.3.7; 5.87.4; 6.12.2; 8.12.27.

27

ṚV 4.8.11; 8.89.12; cf.6.20.2; 8.12.27.

28

ṚV 6.69.8b.

29

Cf. Agni in ṚV 1.26.3, Indra in 4.17.17-18.

30

Cf. ṚV 7.100.2,4–5; 8.25.12.

31

ṚV 6.49.13.

32

ṚV 7.36.9; cf. 1.164.36.

33

ŚB 1.2.5.1–7; 3.6.3.3,16; 4.2.2.10; 4.3.5.8; 4.5.1.16; 5.2.5.4; 5.4.5.18; 11.1.4.4; 12.4.1.4,5; 13.2.2.9; 14.1.1.13.

34

Gonda 1976: 26.

35

Throughout the *Mahābhārata* Nara and Nārāyana are identified as Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa (cf. 1.219.15; 3.45.18; 3.84.4–5; 5.48.20–1; 5.94.42; 6.62.11–12; 7.10.41; 8.12.14–16; 15.39.11). In *Mbh* 7.172.81 it is said that 'they are born from age to age in order to regulate the world's affairs' (*lokayātrāvidhānārtha*ṃ *saṃjāyete yuge yuge*). Perhaps because of this identification Bhattacharji regards Nara as human and Nārāyana as divine, and says: 'Nara-Nārāyana linked as a divine and a human being is an important phenomenon, because it holds the germ of the incarnation theory' (Bhattacharji 1970: 294). Apart from their identification with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, however, Nara and Nārāyana are both

regarded in the *Mahābhārata* as divine Ṛṣi*s*, and no distinction of status is made between them.

36

It is possible that Nārāyana is an ancient Dravidian sea-god, 'the Supreme Being of the Mohenjo-Darians' (Keny 1942: 256).

37

This etymology is also found frequently in the Purānas (e.g. *Brahmāṇḍa* 1.1.5.5; *Viṣṇu* 1.4.6) and in *Mn* 1.10. However, *Mbh* 5.68.10 suggests another etymology, favoured by R. G. Bhandarkar: 'the resting place or goal (*ayana*) of *nāra* or of a collection of *narāḥ*, i.e. men' (Bhandarkar 1913: 30). Another possible explanation is that of Madeleine Biardeau. She sees Nārāyaṇa as derived from the use of *puruṣāyaṇa* in *PU* 6.5, where 'these sixteen parts of this perceiver (… *asya paridraṣṣur imāḥ ṣoḍaśakalāḥ*)' are said to be '*puruṣāyaṇāḥ*', just as rivers are *samudrāyaṇāḥ* i.e. both are on their way to becoming totally engulfed in the greater reality to which they belong. For some unexplained reason '*nara*' was substituted for '*puruṣa*' to give the name Nārāyaṇa, which Biardeau interprets as 'He who is formed from (the sixteen parts or the creatures) who have their course directed towards the Puruṣa' (… *celui qui est formé (des seize parties ou des créatures) qui ont leur cours dirigé vers le Puruṣa*) (Biardeau 1981: 24–6).

38

E.g. the reliefs in the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh (early sixth century) and in the Mahiṣāsuramardinī cave at Mahābalipuram (seventh century).

39

Cf. *Viṣṇu* 1.2.12; 6.5.82.

40

For a brief description of the findings from the Morā excavation, see Brockington 1998: 344, note 85.

41

The fact that Saṃkarṣaṇa's name heads the list of the 'five holy heroes' may point to a time when he was more important than Vāsudeva (cf. Jaiswal 1967: 121).

42

Most of the texts of the Pāñcarātras (mostly called *saṃhitās*) were composed between the fifth and the tenth centuries CE, but the ideas and practices which they expound are much older. The name Pāñcarātra has been variously explained, e.g. from the five

days of Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa's sacrifice in *ŚB* 13.6.1.7, or from their 'distinctive feature of a maximum of five nights' stay in a habitation' (Brockington 1981: 79). The Pāñcarātras have sometimes been identified with the Bhāgavatas, but the two are probably better seen as separate Vaiṣṇava groupings. Their main doctrines survive today in the teaching of the Srīvaiṣṇavas (see Esnoul 1979: 1–8; Jaiswal 1967: 41–6; Schrader 1973).

43

The *vyūhas are* 'successive emanations from God and at the same time part of his essential nature' (Gonda 1976: 49). Gonda goes on to say that this term is used 'in the technical vocabulary of the Vedic ritualists … to express the idea of an effective arranging, taking or pushing asunder the parts of a coherent whole' (*Ibid.*: 50).

44

Dandekar connects both Kṛṣṇa and Vāsudeva with a pre-Aryan *bhakti* cult which he believes to have been one of the two distinctive features (the other being the yogic 'Muni-Yati-cult') of the indigenous religion which the Vedic Aryans found on their arrival in India (Dandekar 1979: 204–5, 233–4). In giving the evidence for *bhakti's* indigenous character, he draws upon Ted J. Solomon's *Early Vaiṣṇava Bhakti and its Autochthonous Heritage*. Solomon summarises the following as 'autochthonous elements in early Vaiṣṇavism': (1) Viṣṇu's union with Mother-goddess figures (śrī-Lakṣmī; Bhūmi-devī); (2) Vaiṣṇavism's association with *nāga* worship; (3) its use of vegetal and aquatic symbolism (Solomon 1970: 44–5).

45

See Vaudeville 1968: 737–9, for a study of the relevant literature.

46

Cf. Dandekar 1979: 246. For a fuller discussion of the Ābhīras' relation to Kṛṣṇa, see Jaiswal 1967: 80–4.

47

Dandekar 1979: 217–18.

48

It seems very likely that the original name of Kṛṣṇa's father was Ānakadundubhi (cf. *Hv* 24.15–16; *Viṣṇu* 4.14.29; 4.15.26; *Vāyu* 96.144; *Matsya* 46.11). The name is explained in *Hv* 24.16, *Viṣṇu* 4.14.28 and *Vāyu* 96.145 by reference to the celestial drums which sounded at his birth, but the fact that there is at least one other related clansman whose name ends in '-dundubhi' (the father of Punarvasu who is Candanodaka-dundubhi according to

Vāyu 96.117 or Nandanodaradundubhi according to *Matsya* 44.63) suggests that Ānakadundubhi is a typical clan name and thus more likely than Vasudeva (cf. also *Mbh* 2.30.12; 3.21.7; 16.7.1). Furthermore Kṛṣṇa's older brother is never given the name Vāsudeva which one would expect him to have if it were a patronymic (Jacobi 1914: 195).

49

Dandekar 1979: 249–50.

50

ṚV 1.22.20; 1.154.5.

51

Hardy 1983: 18.

52

Other names besides the classic ten are found in the early lists, even though most of these consist of only ten or fewer names (cf. *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.73.72–105a/Vāyu 98.71–104; *Matsya* 47.237–48. Both give Dattātreya, MāndhātṚ and Vyāsa among their ten names). The Purāṇas also refer to other figures who in some way represent Viṣṇu, e.g. Kapila (*Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.63.*US/Vāyu* 88.147; *Matsya* 12.43; *Viṣṇu* 3.2.55; 4.4.12). The longer lists of *Bhāgavata* 1.3.6–25 and 2.7.1–38 probably give some idea of the range of possibilities from which the classic list emerged.

53

Madeleine Biardeau suggests that the *avatāra* figures all combine three ‘contradictions’ within themselves: (1) destruction and creation; (2) elements of Śiva and of Viṣṇu; (3) *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriya* traits (Biardeau 1976: 182–5). I do not find these criteria convincing; Biardeau treats Paraśurāma's story as the paradigm of the *avatāra* narrative, and selects features of other episodes which conform in some way to his. Yet the only argument in favour of treating Paraśurāma in this way appears to be the circular one that his story contains the very contradictions which Biardeau is seeking to establish as the defining characteristics of the *avatāra* figure.

54

There is a striking example in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the imposition of a mythical framework upon a series of already existing stories. In *Judges* 2–16 the stories of Israel's early leaders have been bound together by the Deuteronomic historian so that they have all become variations on the theme of of Yahweh's rescue of his people from the consequences of their recurring disloyalty to him. As Northrop Frye says: ‘Here there is a series of

different contents, along with a repeating mythical or narrative form which contains them. The heavy emphasis on the structure, where because of the moral interest we are in effect being told the same kind of story over and over again, indicates that the individual stories are being made to fit that pattern' (Frye 1983: 41). This could almost have been written about the *avatāra* framework and the stories which it encloses, although in this case the interest is theological rather than moral, and the material which has been made to fit the pattern comes from a wider range of sources.

55

In the volume on the Purāṇas which he contributed to Gonda's *History of Indian Literature*, Ludo Rocher mentions eighty-two without making any claim that this number is exhaustive.

56

Pargiter regards *vedasammita*, which he translates as 'of equal measure with the Veda', as being a stronger term than *vedasammata*, to which it is 'sometimes toned down' (Pargiter 1922: 30, note 3). Monier-Williams translates both terms as 'conformable to the Veda', and *vedasammita* also as 'of equal measure with the Veda' (Monier-Williams 1956: 1016).

57

Cf. *Devībhāgavata* 1.3.21, quoted by Rocher 1986: 16, note 12, and by Hazra 1975: 213.

58

Dimmitt & van Buitenen 1978: 9. Wilson refers to its date as 56 BC, but gives no reason for his dating (Wilson 1979: v).

59

These lines from the *Vāyu* have parallels (sometimes in almost exact words) in *Agni* 1.14, *Brahmavaivarta* 4.133.6, *Garuḍa* 1.21.5,14, *Kūrma* 1.1.12, *Matsya* 53.65, *Śiva (Vāyavīya Saṃhitā)* 1.1.41, *Skanda* 7.2.84, *Viṣṇu* 3.6.25 and *Varāha* 2.4.

60

Wilson 1979: iv–v.

61

Pratisarga is used to mean dissolution or destruction in *Vāyu* 100.133, 102.135. In *Viṣṇu* 6.1, before the narrator Parāśara has described the different types of *pralaya* (dissolution of the worlds), his questioner Maitreya does not include *pratisarga* with the other *pañcalakṣaṇa* items in his brief recapitulation of what he has been told. When Parāśara has finished his descriptions of

the *pralaya*, however, he sums up what he has told Maitreya as '*sargaś ca pratisargaś ca vaṃśamanvantarāṇi ca / vaṃśānucaritam* …' (6.8.2; cf. 6.8.13).

62

Narayana Rao, in Doniger 1993: 87–8.

63

This is demonstrated on pp 147–9.

64

Bailey 1995: 2.

65

Bailey 1986: 2. This approach is also recommended by Gavin Flood: 'To understand the Purāṇas it makes more sense to treat them as complete texts in themselves and examine them and their intertextuality synchronically, rather than to try to establish their diachronic or historical sequence' (Flood 1996: 110).

66

D. F Pocock, 'Art and theology in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa' in Das 1986: 9–39.

67

Goldman 1971: 45–62.

68

Ingalls 1968: 394.

69

Vaidya 1969: xxxvii–xxxix.

70

'*S'il fallait absolument proposer une date de composition pour le HV, l'on serait enclin à parler du milieu ou de la fin de l'epoque Kuṣāṇa, soit quelque part entre le Ier et le IIIe siècle de notre ère*' (Couture 1991: 77).

71

'… *Une série de passages pouvant faire allusion à des représentations artistiques typiques de l'époque Kuṣāṇa ou de l'époque Śunga qui l'a précédée*' (*Ibid.*: 76).

72

Joshi 1979: 92–4. He gives the relevant passages, all from the Vulgate version of the *Hv*, as *Viṣṇuparvan* 26.43–54; 35.60–3; 41.6–33; 42.25–8; 89.1–3.

73

Couture 1991: 77. On *devaputra*, see also Wolpert 1989: 74 and

Kulke & Rothermund 1986: 82.

74

Srinivasan, in Williams 1981: 133, note 6.

75

Ibid.: 129–32.

76

Ingalls 1968: 382.

77

Brinkhaus 1990: 417–18. Ingalls, on the other hand, thinks that the title *Harivaṃśa* belonged originally to the *Viṣṇuparvan* (*Op. cit.:* 382).

78

Couture 1996: 129–35.

79

Hardy 1983: 79. See also the discussion of date in Hawley 1983: 26–8. The latter is inclined to see the *Bālacarita* as 'a work of about the seventh to ninth centuries' (Hawley 1983: 27).

80

E.g. Kṛṣṇa is almost always called Dāmodara, a name which is used much less frequently in the *Harivaṃśa;* he is Devakī's seventh son, not her eighth; the details of Vasudeva's meeting with Nandagopa differ considerably; the cart which Kṛṣṇa overturns and the trees which he uproots are embodiments of demonic forces; the *asura* Pralamba appears in the form of Nandagopa and not, as in the *Harivaṃśa*, of a cowherd boy.

81

Cf. Hein 1986: 305–7.

82

See Thapar 1966: Chapter 6. Cf. Wolpert 1989: 70.

83

I am not trying to suggest that the Govardhana episode originated simply from the emergence of *vaiśya* ideology. The articles by Paul Toomey in Khare 1992 and Charlotte Vaudeville in Sontheimer & Kulke 1991 show what a complex web of myth and folklore connected with Kṛṣṇa and his brother is involved in this story.

84

The position of the *vaiśyas* in the traditional class system is ambiguous. On the one hand, they are ranked as 'twice-born' (*dvija*), together with the brahmins and the *kṣatriyas*, and *ChU*

5.10.7 regards birth as a *vaiśya* as good. On the other hand, as here, they are sometimes classed with the *śūdras* as having low social origins.

85

Dandekar 1979: 253.

86

In his introduction to the *Bālakāṇḍa*, Robert Goldman remarks that the *Harivaṃśa* 'stands … in a complicated relationship to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and that 'its authors must certainly have used the *Rāmāyaṇa* as their inspiration and model' (Goldman 1984: 46). He points in particular to Kṛṣṇa's breaking of Kaṃsa's bow in Mathurā, which 'must certainly be an adaptation of the story of Rāma's breaking of Janaka's bow that forms the climax of the *Bālakāṇḍa*' (*Ibid.:* 46, note 89).

87

I am unable to agree with Norvin Hein's theory that whereas the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavadgītā* had met the needs of the Maury an age by 'calling the alienated young back to their duties in the brahmanical social order' (Hein 1986: 293), the Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivaṃśa*, 'young, irresponsible, a reckless smasher of pots, an impetuous romancer, free as the wind' (*Ibid.:* 313), appeared as a liberator from the somewhat oppressive age of the Guptas. This interpretation not only depends on too late a date for the *Harivaṃśa*, but its portrait of the 'irresponsible … reckless … impetuous' Kṛṣṇa is not altogether in accordance with the *Harivaṃśa*'s own portrait, as Chapter 3 will show. To give but one example now, Hein describes the infant Kṛṣṇa as 'laughing amid its wreckage' after upsetting the cart (*Ibid.:* 209), whereas *Hv* 50.6 says that he was crying.

88

Pargiter 1922: 80.

89

Hazra 1975: 24.

90

O'Flaherty, in Smith 1983: 107–8.

91

1.6.29–31 follows a passage in which time is identified with 'an aspect of Hari' (*aṃśaḥ … hareḥ*, 1.6.14) so this may perhaps be seen as another account of Viṣṇu's promotion of heresy.

92

See Hacker's comments on this teaching (Hacker 1959: 89).

93

Cf. 1.19.46, 1.20.34 in the Prahlāda episode, and Mucukunda's assertion in 5.23.47 that Kṛṣṇa can grant him *nirvāṇa*.

94

Smith 1983: 108. On the subject of how the Purāṇas view heretics, see also Dandekar 1995.

95

A. K. Narain, in Smith 1983: 35–6. E.g. Samudra Gupta is described in the Allahabad pillar inscription as '… the giver of (many) millions of lawfully acquired cows and gold, … the restorer of the Aśvamedha sacrifice that had long been in abeyance', but his official seal bore the Vaiṣṇava image of Garuḍa (Quoted by Narain from D. C. Sircar: *Select Inscriptions on Indian History and Civilization*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1965: 270–1).

96

Smith 1983: 55.

97

He defines 'allegory' rather loosely as 'a story which serves as an analogy to a real-life person or event, usually making that person or event more vivid, poignant and dramatic' (*Op. cit.:* 54).

98

Rocher 1986: 249.

99

The story which connects Purukutsa with the river is given at 4.1.5–15.

100

A different, and longer, line of transmission is given for the *Viṣṇu* in 6.8.43–50. Sārasvata is the only name which appears in both lists.

101

Kulke & Rothermund 1986: 89.

102

Wilson 1979: lxi.

103

Rocher 1986: 147–8.

104

This is the date which both Rocher and Tagare say is put forward by S. D. Gyani on p. 132 of 'The Date of the Purāṇas', an article in the *NIA* for September 1942. However, this page contains nothing about the *Bhāgavata*, but merely says that 'the *Purāṇa*

embodying old traditions and tales of heroes of yore, had attained a definite literary form during the period, between B.C. 1200 to B.C. 1000, the time of the *Atharva Veda*'. On p. 134 Gyani says 'the Bhāgavata is taken to the 6th cent. A.D.', supporting this statement by a reference to Hazra 1940: 55.

105

Rocher gives 'Colebrooke; Wilson; Burnouf; Lassen; MacDonnell; etc' as holding this view (Rocher 1986: 148).

106

Rocher 1986: 144–5.

107

Śarma suggested that there was at least one quotation from the *Bhāgavata* in Rāmānuja, in the *Vedāntatattvasāra* (Śarma 1932–3: 187–8). However, the Rāmānuja who is the author of this text is later than the Rāmānuja who is in question here (cf. Hardy 1983: 487, note 21). Hardy also rejects the idea that Gauḍapāda quoted from the *Bhāgavata* and expresses doubt as to whether it was quoted by Abhinavagupta (*Ibid.:* 487).

108

Some of those who regarded the *Bhāgavata* as the work of Vopadeva held that it was not in fact a *mahāpurāṇa*. They contended that the *Bhāgavata* of the *purāṇa* lists is the *Devibhāgavata* or the *Kālikā*. Rocher 1986: 147, note 56, gives details of twentieth century proponents of this view.

109

Hardy 1983: 488.

110

Vaidya 1925: 156–8. (He incorrectly identifies the reference to the devotees who drink from the Southern rivers as 10.5.40.)

111

Hardy 1983: 637–46.

112

Ibid.: 642.

113

Hopkins, in Singer 1966: 3–22.

114

Ibid.: 22.

115

Ibid.: 21.

116

Ibid.: 22.

117

Ibid.: 6.

118

Ibid.: 511–12, 526.

119

Ibid.: 525.

120

Hopkins exaggerates the degree of criticism levelled against Vedic religion in the *Bhāgavata*. As will be seen in later chapters, the *Bhāgavata* shows respect for the Vedas and the brāhmaṇical order.

121

Kulke & Rothermund 1986: 121–2; Thapar 1966: 194–200.

122

In 10.88.1–2 Parīkṣit asks Śuka why the worshippers of Śiva are usually wealthy, whereas those who worship Kṛṣṇa are poor, and Śuka tells him how Kṛṣṇa once answered this same question, when it was asked him by Yudhiṣṣhira (10.88.6–11): he removes his worshippers' wealth so that they may learn to depend on his grace alone. However, this might be more in keeping with a direct Pāṇḍya provenance, suggesting that Vaiṣṇavas would fare less well than Śaivas in a Cōḻa-dominated area.

123

E.g. in 10.58.32–47 the setting of the story of how Kṛṣṇa won a bride by fighting seven bulls is changed in order to make it more comprehensible to a non-Tamil audience; an explanatory note is given in 10.47.11 to introduce the song of the bee messenger which follows (Hardy 1983: 524).

124

C. Mackenzie Brown notes that 'there is a strong Puranic manuscript tradition, going back probably to the early centuries of the Christian era', and quotes Ruth Finnegan as seeing 'no sharp break between oral and written forms of "literature"' (Brown 1985: 7).

125

However, David Shulman considers it possible that the *Bhāgavata* may have been the work of a single author. (See Shulman in Doniger 1993: 126.)

CHAPTER TWO

1

A version of parts of this chapter appeared in the Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies, Vol.4, No.3, Summer 1996.

2

I take the point made by Laurie L. Patton that such a use of 'transitional' in connection with one particular text 'assumes that religious history consists of "periods" in which texts were not transitional but more "stable" in nature', and that it would be more appropriate to 'take the view that all texts are in some way transitional texts, moving between and interacting with different versions of reality' (Patton, in Doniger 1993: 4). Nevertheless, there are some texts where the interaction is strikingly obvious, and the *Harivaṃśa* is one of these.

3

Mbh 3.257–275.

4

Couture suggests that the *Harivaṃśa* was added to the *Mahābhārata* in order to make up the 16,000 or so verses which the latter needed in order to bring its total number up to 100,000 (Couture 1991: 65).

5

For a discussion of this presentation of Kṛṣṇa, see Sutton 2000: 175–8.

6

A clear and up-to-date discussion of this question is provided by John Brockington in Lipner 1997: 28–32.

7

Cf. van Buitenen 1981: 5–6.

8

The *Anugītā (Mbh* 14.16–50) purports to be Kṛṣṇa's repetition of his earlier teaching to Arjuna, but it begins with a declaration of his inability to remember what he formerly said, and what follows is the wisdom of various sages rather than his own.

9

Van Buitenen 1981: 28.

10

The fact that it is a child who contains the universe implies some

link with the stories told about the child Kṛṣṇa in *Bhāgavata* 10.7.34–7 and 10.8.32–45. Mārkaṇḍeya's story is told in *Bhāgavata* 12.9.7–34, but this version does not include the teaching which the sage gives in *Mbh* 3.

11

They are not always seen as exclusively human. In 13.143.7 Kṛṣṇa is identified with Varāha, who is also similarly identified, together with Vāmana and Kapila, by Yudhiṣṣhira in 12.43.8,12,28. Indra speaks to Karṇa in 3.294.28. of Kṛṣṇa as 'the great-spirited one whom those wise in the Veda call the Boar' (*sa mahātmanā // yam āhur vedavidvāṃso varāham* …).

12

This is reminiscent of 5.7 where Kṛṣṇa, upon awakening, bestows boons upon Arjuna and Duryodhana.

13

Biardeau 1976: 114, note 4.

14

Esnoul 1979: 3, note 2: '… *ce qui le rendrait à peu près contemporain du* Harivaṃśa'.

15

In purāṇic cosmography it is usually Puskaradvīpa, the remotest of the *dvīpas*, which lies beyond the Ocean of Milk.

16

Cf. Kṛṣṇa's four forms in *Mbh* 7.28.22–6.

17

In the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* Nara and Nārāyaṇa are consistently portrayed as ascetic Ṛṣi*s*, not as the warrior heroes who appear in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*.

18

As Biardeau points out, the position of *manas* in the scheme of evolution is a fluctuating one. Sometimes it is the equivalent of *mahat* and sometimes it is the eleventh *indriya* (Biardeau 1981: 17). Here it appears to be the equivalent of *mahat*.

19

This identification with *ahaṃkāra* is mentioned again in 12.327.26–7, although elsewhere *ahaṃkāra* is identified with Brahmā (12.335.18) whereas Aniruddha is that form of God which is nearest to the manifest universe, i.e. the sleeper upon the ocean, from whose navel springs the lotus which opens to reveal Brahmā (cf. 12.326.69). There is obviously a close connection

between Aniruddha and Brahmā in the work of creation.

20

This word is derived from √*bhū* with the prefix *prādur-*: 'to become manifest, be visible or audible, appear, arise, exist' (Monier-Williams 1956: 707).

21

It may be that Kṛṣṇa is already implied in 3.100.21 as the slayer of Jambha, but this is unlikely in view of the fact that the reference to Jambha's death is quite different in its formulation from those phrases which describe Viṣṇu's assumption of a body (*vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthāya … nārasiṃhaṃ vapuḥ kṚtvā … vāmanaṃ vapur āśritya*). It would seem more likely that the fourth term in the list is intended to be perceived as a feat performed by Viṣṇu in his own shape. The foursome in the *Nārāyaṇīya* is regarded by Suvira Jaiswal as as one which 'seems to represent the original nucleus [of the *avatāra* list]' (Jaiswal 1967: 120). It is also found in *Mārkaṇḍeya* 5.54–6.

22

At this point some versions of the *Mahābhārata* introduce other figures to make up the *daśāvatāra* list, but they are generally acknowledged to be a later addition.

23

I am not pursuing the question of this connection between the *avatāras* and the intervals between the *yugas* because it is not touched upon in any of my three main texts (although it may have been important in the formation of the *daśāvatāra* list, accounting for the presence of Paraśurāma and Rāma Dāśarathi within it). It is a connection which is known in the purāṇic tradition, but does not seem to have been much stressed. The two references which I have found to Viṣṇu being born 'at the ends of *yugas*' (*yugānteṣu*) are both in *Vāyu* 97: vv5,64. Neither of these occurs in the corresponding parts of *Matsya*, and v.5 is not even found in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.72.5, which one would expect to be almost identical with *Vāyu* 97.5. However, *Matsya* 47.34 says that Viṣṇu is born 'at the turn of the *yuga*' (*yuge … paravṚtte*).

24

Brockington points out that this is based on *Rām* 6.116.80–90, and has a parallel in *Mbh* 2, App. 21.492–582 (Brockington 1998: 477).

25

Note also Bhīṣma's retelling of the story in Book 6 and the account in the *Rāmopākhyāna* of how the gods are born on earth

in order to help in the fight against Rāvaṇa (*Mbh* 3.260).

26

Paul Hacker regarded this use of *bhārāvatāraṇa* as having been determinative in the process whereby *avatāra* became the technical term for Viṣṇu's manifestations for the restoration of the balance between *dharma* and *adharma* (Hacker 1960: 60).

27

The *Harivaṃśa*'s inclusion of this account could mean that it was added to the *Mahābhārata* at a stage when the *Ādiparvan* did not contain Chapters 58 and 61. Since the formation of the two texts probably overlapped each other (Biardeau 1978: 205), there is no need to envisage the *Harivaṃśa* as added on to the *Mahābhārata* as it is today.

28

These two accounts may perhaps be variants of an earlier myth which is preserved in *Mārkaṇḍeya* 5, where the leader of the gods' descent is Indra, and Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa is not so much as mentioned. It is much more likely that the leader of the descent should change from Indra to Viṣṇu than the other way round. Dumézil regards *Mārkaṇḍeya* 5 as probably older than the other versions (Dumézil 1968: 116; cf. Scheuer 1982: 119–27).

29

The literal meaning of *nirvivara* is 'having no opening'. Nīlakaṇṣha glosses *nirvivarīkṚtā* with *nirucchvāsā*, 'breathless'.

30

For the Hindu perception of overpopulation as an evil see O'Flaherty 1980: 28ff.

31

Hence her name Medinī (42.33).

32

The basic meaning of *aṃśa* is 'share, portion, part'. It can be used to denote a fragment or fraction of a material thing, or an aspect, element, factor or faculty of something immaterial (Ghatage 1976: 3–17). The idea which it expresses in the accounts of the gods' descent in *Hv* 40–5 and *Mbh* 1.54–61 appears to be that each divinity divides itself so that one part maintains the god's usual functions and the other leads a more or less independent life on earth (cf. *Mbh* 15.39.12–13). Although there are passages where *aṃśa* appears to mean 'part' in a physical sense, it is not seen as a detached fragment which no longer has any connection with the whole which it represents. In this it appears to be in line

with the later usage of *aṃśa* in Rāmānuja (cf. Lipner 1986: 86). An instance of *aṃśa* in which this idea is particularly strong is found in *Hv* 45.32, where Kaśyapa's life on earth is now to be determined by the same aspect of his nature (presumably his greed for cows) which led him to become a thief.

33

In view of Nārada's role in later Vaiṣṇava literature as one of Viṣṇu's chief *bhaktas* this anger may seem strange, but it is very much in keeping with the Nārada of the *Harivaṃśa*, the messenger between gods and humans who often makes trouble and is described here as the 'discloser of secret discords to the world, like Rahu' (*bhettā jagati guhyānāṃ vigrahāṇāṃ grahopamaḥ*, 44.10–11; cf. 46.29–30).

34

Not only does he know the earthly forms of all the enemies who have been mentioned, but he knows of others as well (Kāliya, 45.7; Jarāsaṃdha and Naraka, 45.8).

35

It may seem odd that Viṣṇu should need to take advice from a lesser god, but it is in keeping with the relationship between him and Brahmā as described in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*. Brahmā's duties at the beginning of each *kalpa*, according to *Mbh* 12.326, are to be Nārāyaṇa's son and the superintendent of the worlds (*matputratvaṃ ca kalpādau lokādyakṣatvam eva ca*, v.58a), but when Nārāyaṇa has manifested himself to do the gods' work Brahmā is to instruct and command him as though the relationship were reversed (12.326.61).

36

This identification given to Vasudeva, Devakī and Rohinīis curious, since by making them cowherds it leaves no role for Nanda and Yaśodā to play, and seems to be out of line with the situation described in *Hv* 46. It suggests that there may once have been a story in which Kṛṣṇa was simply born into a cowherd community — although, as Biardeau points out, Devakī is a more likely name for a princess than for a *gopī* (Biardeau 1978: 212, note 1).

37

'Cause yourself to descend by your own power to the earth and fill the wombs of Devakī and Rohinī' (*ātmānam ātmanā hi tvam avatārya mahītalam / devakīm rohiṇīṃ caiva garbhābhyāṃ paritoṣaya //*). This suggests that both Kṛṣṇa and his brother Saṃkarṣaṇa are to be seen as manifestations of Viṣṇu.

38

Compare this with the statement about the two hairs in *Mbh* 1.189.31.

39

Cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.15.46–9, where all the Yādavas are said to be descended gods.

40

Since the Pāṇḍavas together embody Indra's kingly qualities (cf. Hiltebeitel 1976: 167), this may be another reminder of a time when Śrī was regarded as Indra's consort, not Viṣṇu's. Hiltebeitel sees between Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa an 'intimate but non-committal relationship … full of ambiguities: identical names [she is also called Kṛṣṇā, cf. *Mbh* 1.155.50], a coded language, and at times, the sense that while she is "in essence" and "in intention" united with him, she is forever provisionally preoccupied with others' (Hiltebeitel 1976: 227).

41

Vaidya 1969: xxxvii–xxxix.

42

However, the 'dynasty' which is meant here may simply be the list of Kṛṣṇa's descendants in 98, and not necessarily the whole of the 'Dynasty of Hari' (*Harivaṃśa*).

43

Possibly four main sections, if *Hv* 78 is regarded as the end of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla's story and 79 as the beginning of a cycle of stories about Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva.

44

This chapter numbering is according to the ASS edition of the *Brahma*. According to the Verikaṣeśvara edition, it is 1–15. Unless otherwise stated, all other references to the *Brahma* are also to the ASS edition.

45

Kirfel 1979: 2–5,141–52,155–73,226–30, 233–50,254–72,284–94,299–339,349–97,410–46,449–63,536–56.

46

As Hardy points out, this conversation makes a distinction between the *Mahābhārata* and what is to follow: the former is described as *ākhyāna* (vv1,8), *purāṇa* (v.4), *purātana* (v.11) and *itihāsa*, while the latter is described as a *vaṃśa* (v.6), which Janamejaya had requested from Vaiśaṃpāyana as one particularly skilled in this type of narrative (*vaṃśakuśala*, v.12;

Hardy 1983: 69).

47

There is no connection between any of this and the relationship between Viṣṇu and Brahmā depicted in the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*. At the level of textual criticism this can simply be taken to indicate that 1–27 belongs to a period when Brahmā, and not Viṣṇu, was regarded as the Supreme God. The point which I wish to make here is that the compilers of the *Harivaṃśa* do nothing to correct this perspective, which was out of date in their own time, because they want to make a dramatic change in the perspective later on to give Viṣṇu more prominence.

48

Some MSS read '*viṣṇuh*' here, not '*jiṣṇuḥ*'.

49

According to the ASS edition of the *Brahma*, only 23.168 has a parallel, but the Veṅkaṣeśvara contains all these verses except *Hv* 7.56. It is therefore difficult to say whether or not the bulk of these verses were added by the compiler of the *Harivaṃśa*.

50

This is true of other purāṇic versions of the story also, e.g. *Vāyu* 96.20–98, *Matsya* 45.

51

Rocher 1986: 95–9.

52

There is a parallel text in *Matsya* 47, which has been translated, with an introductory article, by Robert Goldman (Goldman 1971).

53

This war has already been mentioned in 20.34.

54

These two verses are not completely identical, but both express the same sentiment that, while other beings may have other *gurus*, Earth's *guru* is Nārāyaṇa.

55

This triad of memories appears to refer back to Chapter 31. The reason why Padmanābha appears in the place of the more usual Varāha may be that in 31.21–30 the latter is not presented as an *asura*-slayer, whereas the death of Madhu and Kaiṣabha is related briefly there as the *pauṣkarakaprādurbhāva* (31.14–20).

56

Earth also refers to Jāmadagnya's depriving her of her *kṣatriyas* in

42.39, but she does not identify him with Viṣṇu.

57

On Viṣṇu as sacrifice and as *yogin*, see Couture 1977: 59–65.

58

The story which Kaṃsa tells his elephant-keeper in *Hv* 73, of how his father was a Dānava who deceived his virtuous mother by assuming her husband's shape, is not intended as an alternative to the idea that Kaṃsa is Kālanemi reborn, but as an explanation of how he could be so cruel as to oppress those who appeared to be his relations, Ugrasena and Devakī.

59

Couture translates *svadeham aparam* as '*sa forme suprême*' (Couture 1991: 146).

60

Vaidya 1969: xxxvii–xxxix.

61

It is also used twenty-eight times in the later continuation of the *Harivaṃśa* (100.23,26,37,38,39,42,43,47,49,53,54,57a,57b,64, 65,71,75,78a,78b,81;104.9;113.59,75a[2x],75b[2x],82).

CHAPTER THREE

1

The place of the *Harivaṃśa* in the study of Kṛṣṇa is not unlike that of Mark's Gospel in New Testament studies. For a long time Mark was regarded as a fairly straightforward account of the ministry of Jesus, with a minimum of interpretation, before it became accepted that, like the other Gospels, it had its own theological perspective.

2

Ingalls 1968: 381.

3

This discrepancy makes one wonder if Chapter 78 was in fact the end of the original *Kṛṣṇacarita*. If it is also true that it started with the infant Kṛṣṇa already in the herder settlement, as was suggested on p. 36, this would give a story which is entirely concerned with a young cowherd.

4

'Settlement' and 'encampment' are used here (in translations and in the main text) for what the *Harivaṃśa* calls *vraja, gokula, goṣṣha* or *ghoṣa*. All four words refer to the temporary settlement of a group of nomadic cowherds, with the immediately surrounding grazing ground for the cattle (cf. Couture 1991: 43). Later *vraja* is regarded as the name of an area, Braj, which has become a place of pilgrimage.

5

In 40.37 Nidrā is Viṣṇu's twin sister (*sahajām*). Although a goddess in her own right she accepts this role of sister or daughter, a role which she plays also in the first episode of the *Devīmāhātmya*, where her part in the action consists in removing herself from Viṣṇu so that he can kill Madhu and Kaiṣabha (*DM* 1.89–90).

6

The name of these *asuras* indicates their suitability for the role that they are to play, as does also the story told in 47.19–22 that they have been cursed by Hiraṇyakaśipu to be killed by their father Kālanemi/Kaṃsa.

7

The plural suggests four arms, and she is described as *caturbhujā* in 48.30, but most MSS have the dual form here (*bibhrati vipulau*

bahū). Many MSS also have *divi* for *bhuvi*.

8

She is described in 48.30 also as ‘wearing dark blue and yellow garments’ (*nīlapītāmbaradharā*). These colours are associated with Saṃkarṣaṇa and Kṛṣṇa respectively (cf. 52.2).

9

This amazement is stressed in a line which CE regards as part of a later addition after 50.18: ‘The cowherds with their human minds all disbelieved this’ (*na ca śraddhur gopāḥ sarve mānuṣabuddhayaḥ*, 633* line 3). *Mānuṣabuddhayaḥ* occurs again in 56.28.

10

Yaśodā has tied him to the mortar to prevent him from crawling too far away from her (51.14).

11

The *śrīvatsa* mark is usually a recognisable clue to Kṛṣṇa's identity (601*; 55.2; 62.5; 68.20; cf. 31.10).

12

Cf. *Bālacarita* III, Interlude, where the herdsman Damaka describes Nandagopa's prosperity since the birth of his ‘son’.

13

It is this name which is most often used for Kṛṣṇa's brother in the earlier chapters of the *Harivaṃśa*'s *Kṛṣṇacarita*. The name Balarāma, which he is usually given today, occurs nowhere in the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu* or the *Bhāgavata*. Rāma, Bala and Saṃkarṣaṇa are his most common names, and where Bala becomes part of a compound it is always Baladeva or Balabhadra.

14

This reference to *gopajanma* may be another indication that there was once a story of Kṛṣṇa purely as a cowherd (though perhaps a divine cowherd) with no reference to *kṣatriya* origins.

15

This simile of fire recurs, e.g. Kaṃsa sees Kṛṣṇa as ‘growing like a fire’ (*vardhamānam ivānalam*) in 65.1 (cf. 65.35; 71.49).

16

He does this ‘with his left hand’ (*savyena pāṇinā*, 61.30), a sign that the action is performed easily and without strain, even though the text makes it plain that it involves tremendous upheaval and disruption (e.g. 61.31–3, 39–42).

17

Note the use of *vīryavān* in vv16,17.

18

Hardy gives several instances from Tamil sources of a connection between Kṛṣṇa and bullfights, and in particular a myth in which he fights bulls to win his bride Pinnai and then joins in the dance called the *kuravai* (See Appendix VIII in Hardy 1983).

19

Hardy draws attention to 'the fact that both in *Hv* 64.1ff. and *Bālacarita* III, prose after v.3, the arrival of the bull Ariṣṭa terminates Kṛṣṇa's dance (*Bc*) or amusement (*Hv*) with the *gopīs*. Given the existence of a Southern custom in which a bullfight is *concluded* by a dance, it is tempting to speculate that the popular imagination *reversed* the sequence of the myth in order to make it conform to the custom it knew in real life' (Hardy 1983: 199–200).

20

In 63.18,22,25,32 they are said to be unmarried girls, *gopakanyā* or *gopakanyakā*. Hardy takes *sīmanta* in 63.34 to 'suggest that some women were pregnant (and naturally, married)', (*Ibid.:* 75, note 85; cf. 73, note 79).

21

According to 63.24 they escape from their fathers, brothers and mothers to search for Kṛṣṇa in the night.

22

Note the use of Govinda and Upendra here. The *Harivaṃśa* emphasises Kṛṣṇa's newly bestowed names, using Govinda also in 62.58,67,78; 63.3,21; 64.12 (and *govindatām* in 62.89).

23

The order of events as given by Kaṃsa is different from their order in the main narrative, and Kaṃsa speaks as though Dhenuka and Pralamba have been killed by Kṛṣṇa.

24

In 49.10 Vasudeva warned Nanda of Keśin's presence in VṚndāvana.

25

The meaning of Keśava is given by Monier-Williams in his Sanskrit-English Dictionary as 'having long or much or handsome hair' (Monier-Williams 1956: 310). *Mbh* 12.328.43 connects it with the idea of the rays of the sun and the moon being Kṛṣṇa's hair.

26

Like Indra in 62.68–88, Nārada urges Kṛṣṇa to finish his personal business with Kaṃsa in order to be able to help the Pāṇḍavas in their war (67.61–7).

27

According to 67.2 Akrūra had expected to recognise Kṛṣṇa from his likeness to Vasudeva.

28

Nīlakaṇṣha sees other clues to Kṛṣṇa's identity in 68.18. He connects the fact that Akrūra sees Kṛṣṇa 'lying on his back' (*uttānaśayinam*) with the child lying on the banyan leaf at the end of the *kalpa (kalpānte bālaṃ vaṣapatraśāyinam*), and finds in 'surrounded by prosperity' (*śriyā vṚtam*) in the same verse an allusion to the myth of Vāmana.

29

This phrase is, of course, reminiscent of the *divyam … cakṣuḥ* of which Kṛṣṇa speaks in *BhG* 11.8.

30

Both here and in the Syamantaka episode Akrūra is presented as a man of great piety (cf.29.24–7).

31

These interactions between Kṛṣṇa and people of the *vaiśya* class in Mathurā may be another indication that the compilers of the *Harivaṃśa* wish to stress his apparent *vaiśya* status. The *Bālacarita* contains no such episodes.

32

Once again *āścarya* is used to mark an event which appears to have no explanation.

33

He signals with his left hand. The same phrase is used which showed the effortlessness with which Kṛṣṇa supported Mt Govardhana, but it is not easy to see what the significance is here — perhaps Kaṃsa's arrogance in believing that he is still able to have all his orders obeyed.

34

This name is used here at 76.5,8, but it occurs much less frequently once the brothers have left VṚndāvana.

35

So far Kṛṣṇa and Rāma have fought only with their hands, or with improvised weapons taken from their opponents (e.g.

Arista's horn, 64.20; Kuvalayāpīḍa's tusk, 74.33).

36

Since he sees them worship Śiva (79.8), he may be forgiven for not recognising their true identity.

37

Biardeau translates this as '*Il n'y a pas de doute, il (= Jarāsaṃdha) se précipite pour faire l'oeuvre des dieux*' (Biardeau 1978: 222). However, it seems very unlikely that Kṛṣṇa would speak of Jarāsaṃdha as doing the gods' work. I prefer to follow Langlois' interpretation: '*Oui, sans doute, l'oeuvre que nous avons à remplir pour les dieux se presse et se précipite*' (Langlois 1834: 386).

38

Although the word *bhārāvataraṇa* is not used, Kṛṣṇa is here picking up the theme of Earth's complaint to the gods, seeing it in terms of the overpopulation described by Brahmā in 41.18–32.

39

In vv61,67 Rāma's plough is compared to a snake, an association which links together his name Saṃkarṣaṇa ('ploughing') and his identification with the cosmic serpent Śeṣa.

40

In a later addition to the story (941*) the celestial weapons are said to return to heaven at the end of the battle.

41

The voice also says that Jarāsaṃdha has not much longer to live —presumably a reference to his death at Bhīma's hands in *Mbh* 2.22.

42

In other versions of this myth Naraka is said to be Viṣṇu's son, conceived by PṚthivī after she had been rescued by him as Varāha (cf. *Vi* 5.29.23). Hence his name 'Bhauma', son of Bhūmī (91.7; 92.33).

43

Kṛṣṇa's marriages to Satyabhāmā, Vratinīand Padmāvatī, the daughters of Satrājit, are mentioned at *Hv* 28.34, in the Syamantaka episode. There is no further reference to Satyabhāmā's sisters.

44

The Vulgate *Harivaṃśa* gives a longer version of this story in which Kṛṣṇa does battle with Indra for the *pārijāta* tree. This is now the Critical Edition's Appendix 1, No.29, but *Hv* 93.57–8

appears to refer to it.

45

The only other point at which Garuḍa has been mentioned so far (though he was not named then) is 62.7, where Śakra sees him shadowing Kṛṣṇa with his wings.

46

Kṛṣṇa is usually said to have eight chief queens. A variant here gives *pramukhā* for *saptamā*.

47

A variant gives *devīm* (referring to Devakī) for *devau*.

48

*Maheśvara*ḥ and *sureśvara*ḥ are variants which make better sense than the *saheśvara*ḥ chosen by the Critical Edition at 4b–5.

49

The comparison with Śrī suggests that Ekanaṃśā is to be seen as Kṛṣṇa's consort rather than — or as well as — his sister; cf. Hudson, in Hawley & Wulff 1982: 256.

50

There is a hint of this attitude in the *Bālacarita* also, when Kaṃsa is reluctant to kill the baby girl and has to summon up all his courage to do it (*Bc* II.17).

51

The story of Kṛṣṇa's defeat of Bāṇa has not yet been told. It is given in *Hv* 106–13.

52

Cf. *Vāyu* 98.95.

53

Eschmann, Kulke & Tripathi (in Eschmann 1978: 187–8) have drawn attention to a verse in the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* where Mahāviṣṇu, known as Saṃkarṣaṇa, is 'he whom they call Śaṅkara, the lord who causes destruction' (*tam eva śaṃkaraṃ prāhuḥ kṣayakartaram īśvaram, SKS* 3.6.6; cf. Schrader 1973: 41). There are also references to *saṃkarṣaṇāmakarudro* in *Viṣṇu* 2.5.19, and to Śiva's 'having descended as Halāyudha in this Kali age' (*kalau tasminn avatīrṇam halāyudham*) in *Vayu* 23.199. In his *Epic Mythology* Hopkins cites a *Harivaṃśa* reference (H 7595) to the effect that Śeṣa 'was born of Śiva', but if I have identified this correctly as 2.74.34 (CE Appendix 1, No.29, lines 1329–31), it does not postulate any special relationship between Śiva and Śeṣa, but simply gives Ananta as one among many others who

owes his origin to Śiva, implying that the latter is the source of all beings.

54

Cf. *Hv* 58.5.

55

For Ekānaṃśā's connections with Durgā, and with Subhadrā as worshipped at Puri, see Ghosh 1936, Mukherji 1959 and Eschmann 1978: 177–82.

56

In *Bc* II 20. Kārtyāyanī (Durgā) says that she has already killed Sumbha and Nisumbha — and also Mahiṣa. In the prose between vv23 & 24 she also urges her followers: 'Let's go down into the settlement disguised in cowherds' clothes, to witness Lord Viṣṇu's adventures as a child' (*bhagavato viṣṇor bālacaritam anubhavituṃ gopālakaveṣaprachanna ghoṣam evāvatariṣyāmaḥ*).

57

Ingalls 1968: 387.

CHAPTER FOUR

1

Farquhar 1967: 143.

2

For the difference between these two worlds, see van Buitenen 1978: 54,167–8; Laine 1989: 255ff.

3

Farquhar declares that 'the *Vishṇu P* is the best representative of the whole class of sectarian Purāṇas, since it is purely Vaishṇava in its teaching from beginning to end, and yet retains with considerable faithfulness the character of the old unsectarian Purāṇas' (Farquhar 1967: 144). Moriz Winternitz says that it 'approaches the most closely to the old definition of Purāṇa' (Winternitz 1972: 544–5). In his introduction to the first Indian edition of Wilson's translation of the *Viṣṇu*, R. C. Hazra regards it as 'hardly necessary to say that of the extant Purāṇas of the traditional five characteristics our Viṣṇu is the best specimen' (Wilson 1972: (b)); T. J. Hopkins says that it 'preserves better than any other Purāṇa the five traditional topics of the Purāṇas' (Hopkins 1971: 99), and bases his account of purāṇic cosmology on it.

4

Wilson 1972: lvii.

5

'In the notes which I have added to the translation, I have been desirous chiefly of comparing the statements of the text with those of other Purāṇas, and pointing out the circumstances in which they differ or agree; so as to render the present publication a sort of concordance to the whole, as it is not very probable that many of them will be published or translated' (Wilson 1972: lxxii).

6

Pargiter 1922: 80.

7

Winternitz 1972: 545.

8

The *naimitta* dissolution takes place at the end of each *kalpa*, which is regarded as a day in Brahmā's life. Everything that lives on the earth perishes, and the earth itself is flooded by a great

ocean (6.3.14–41). The *prākṚta* dissolution is the collapse into each other of the basic elements which evolved to make the cosmos, so that only *prakṚti* (primal materiality) remains (6.4.11–50). This happens at the end of a life-time of Brahmā, equated in 6.4.47 with a day of Viṣṇu (although the next verse points out that in reality the latter is beyond the time-bound language of days and nights).

9

This chapter numbering is according to the ASS edition. In the Venkatesvara edition it is 72–103.

10

Because so many chapters of the *Brahma* have parallels in other *purāṇas* (cf. Hazra 1975: 147–9), it is generally assumed that the *Brahma* is the borrower. Yet if it borrowed from the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* in more or less their present form it is not easy to see why it should have taken its early chapters from the *Harivaṃśa*, then ignored its *Kṛṣṇacarita* in favour of the *Viṣṇu*'s. It is easier to understand the composition of the *Brahma* if one regards it as mainly made up of independent pieces which the compilers put together in their own preferred order, rather than consisting of pieces extracted from other *purāṇas*.

11

E.g. 1.9.54–6; 1.14.25–32; 2.8.102–5; 3.8.13–15; 3.17.16–30; 5.7.57–9, 61–5,66–9.

12

'As to the outward form, the stanzas of many *stotras* … end in a refrain' (Gonda 1977: 247).

13

E.g. *Mbh* 12.199.12–4.

14

Lit. 'the arrangement of the worlds': the cosmographic passages found in many *purāṇas*.

15

Other such examples are found later in this chapter.

16

According to *Viṣṇu* 5.17.15 Viṣṇu is the Vedāntic name and Vāsudeva the name used by the Sātvatas (presumably the Pāñcarātras).

17

This idea is perhaps derived from the *dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe*

mūrtaṃ caivāmūrtaṃ ca of *BAU* 2.3.1.

18

Note also how Brahmā addresses Viṣṇu in 5.1.34b as 'lord whose two forms are one material and one immaterial' (*ta eva bhavato rūpe mūrtāmūrtātmike prabho*). Again, in 6.7.47 Keśidhvaja tells Khāṇḍikya that '*brahman* is the abode of consciousness. It is twofold in its essential nature, material and immaterial, O king, higher and lower (*āśrayaś cetaso brahma dvidhā tac ca svabhāvataḥ / bhūpa mūrtam amūrtaṃ ca paraṃ cāparam eva ca //*)'.

19

Hacker 1959: 82–3; 86–7.

20

'*… Entfalten den Gedanken, dass Viṣṇu sowohl in der Welt … als auch jenseits ihrer ist, dass er sowohl die Welt schafft und regiert als auch völlig unberührt von ihr bleibt' (Ibid.:* 86).

21

The reference is to the *Ṛg-, Soma-* and *Yajurvedas* (3.3.30).

22

This myth of Indra's losing Śrī may recall a time when she was thought to be his consort.

23

This is perhaps intended to point towards Kṛṣṇa, the *aṃśāṃśa* of 5.1.3,4.

24

The pervasiveness of Viṣṇu in this episode is depicted in sculpture as well as in narrative. 'Though the Kūrma figures invariably in the churning of the ocean scene, the emphasis is mainly on the whole episode rather than on the Kūrma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu' (Desai 1973: 68).

25

Kirfel regards this as part of a longer *pañcalakṣaṇa* passage in his Sarga-Pratisarga Group IIA, but in fact he gives no parallels to it of any substance. There are, however, small-scale parallels: *Viṣṇu* 1.2.18 = *Garuḍa* 4.5; *Viṣṇu* 1.2.19 = *Hv* 1.17; *Viṣṇu* 1.2.31 = *Kūrma* 4.15 & *Mārkaṇḍeya* 46.12.

26

There is an echo of this in 1.4.14, when PṚthivī mentions all four forms in her praises of Viṣṇu.

27

On purāṇic Sāṃkhya, see Larson 1979: 284–91.

28

Ibid.: 243.

29

This applies only to *puruṣa* in its Sāṃkhya sense. When Dhruva quotes the opening words of the *Puruṣasūkta* to Viṣṇu in 1.12.58a the reference to *puruṣa* here is probably intended to continue the identification of Viṣṇu with the Supreme Reality which Dhruva has just made in v.57.

30

Wilson 1972: 117, note 7.

31

Note again the use of negative predication here.

32

Cf. 1.7.36–8.

33

This may mean the total succession of all fourteen Manus, or Manu and the sons who are associated with him in 3.1–2. Wilson translates it as 'Manu and the other patriarchs' (Wilson 1972: 126).

34

Of the four faces, the front and the back are human (the front being often called Saumya and the back being a fierce face sometimes known as Kapila). The side faces are those of a lion and a boar (cf. Srinivasan 1979).

35

The four members of the *vyūha* system (Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) are identified in *Viṣṇudharmottara* 3.44.9–12 with the four faces of the Caturmūrti image (Vāsudeva = Saumya; Saṃkarṣaṇa = Lion; Pradyumna = Boar; Aniruddha = Kapila).

36

Rāma and his half-brothers, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna and Bharata, are together said to make up an *aṃśa* of Viṣṇu (*Rām* 1.15.23–8; 1.17.1–10). Later Rāma comes to be regarded as an *avatāra* in his own right, with Lakṣmaṇa as an *avatāra* of Śeṣa.

37

E.g. *Mārkaṇḍeya* 54–60; *Matsya* 113–23; *Vāyu* 34–6.

38

The number of *varsas* varies, but it is usually nine.

39

All four of these theriomorphic forms have cosmogonic associations. Fish, tortoise and boar are obviously associated with water, but the association is less obvious in the case of the horse. However, in *Mbh* 12.335 it is in the form of Hayasiras that Nārāyaṇa kills Madhu and Kaiṣabha when they emerge from the primordial waters and threaten Brahmā, so that he too has connections with the ocean.

40

Kūrma 1.47 says that each *dvīpa* worships a different god, with no suggestion that they are all to be regarded as identical with each other. *Liṇga* 46.3 speaks of Śiva being worshipped in the various *dvīpas*, without specifying the forms which he takes.

41

This phrase points to the ambiguity of Śeṣa's character, associated as he is with both Viṣṇu and Śiva, an ambiguity which was remarked in Chapter 3 in relation to Saṃkarṣaṇa. The connection with Śiva is brought out even more strongly in *Kūrma* 1.42.26–9:

> 26 The form of Viṣṇu called Śeṣa lies below the Pātālas. He is Rudra as the fire of destruction, the yogic Self, Narasiṃha, Mādhava,
>
> 27 Lord Janārdana who is called Ananta, in the form of a serpent. Resting upon the fire of destruction, he is the support of the universe. 28 Having entered him [i.e. Viṣṇu], the great *yogin* Death, coming forth from his mouth in the form of poisonous flames, himself destroys the world at the end. 29 The incomparable destroyer with a thousand magic powers, sprung from Śaṇkara, is the tāmasic form of Śambhu, Death, who pursues the world (26 *pātālānām adhaś cāste śeṣākhyā vaiṣṇavī tanuḥ / kālāgnirudro yogātmā narasiṃho 'pi mādhavaḥ // 27 yo 'nantaḥ pathyate devo nāgarūpī janārdanaḥ / tadādhāram idaṃ sarvaṃ sa kālāgnim apāsritaḥ // 28 tam āviśya mahāyogī kālas tadvadanotthitaḥ / viṣajvālāmayo 'nte 'sau jagat saṃharati svayam // 29 sahasramāyo 'pratimaḥ saṃharttā śaṇkarodbhavaḥ / tāmasī śāmbhavī mūrtiḥ kālo lokaprakālanaḥ // Kūrma* 1.42.26–9).

42

These two are similarly mentioned in *Mārkandeya* 47.7.

43

Although there is general agreement in the Purāṇas as to Varāha as the name of the present *kalpa*, this is less true of the preceding one; e.g. the *Vāyu* calls it the Sanātana (*Vāyu* 7.6.14). A list of *kalpas* is given in *Vāyu* 21, but this includes neither Varāha nor Sanātana.

44

Ajita is found in the *Viṣṇu* only. In the *Kūrma* Viṣṇu appears to have the same name as the gods for this *manvantara*, Tuṣita, but it is not entirely clear.

45

For a description of the other *varṣas*, see 2.1.24b–6. The whole

idea of the best *varṣa* being the one where effort has to be made is in line with *Viṣṇu* 1.5.4–18, where Brahmā is more satisfied with human beings than with any of his other creatures, because they alone are *sādhaka*, capable of working towards some end.

46

The word 'historical' is used here of those figures which belong to the 'real world' of Bhārata. It is not to be understood as conferring historicity in the commonly accepted Western sense upon any of these figures.

47

This could possibly mean that he is an aspect of his brother Kṛṣṇa (cf. 5.1.72; 5.7.38). In view of the *Viṣṇu*'s frequent use of Keśava for Viṣṇu, however, the reference here is more likely to be to the latter as Supreme God. Baladeva later appears with Kṛṣṇa in the Syamantaka story, where there is nothing to identify him with either Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

48

For another reference to Baladeva/Rāma, rather than Kṛṣṇa, as ruler of Dvārakā, see *Matsya* 4.17. The story of his marriage explains how Baladeva, who, like his brother Kṛṣṇa, belongs to the twilight of the *dvāparayuga* (or to the *kaliyuga*, to judge from the comment in *Viṣṇu* 4.1.93 on the physical and mental feebleness of the human race), could have married a bride from an earlier age.

49

This is one way of demonstrating that superiority of Viṣṇu to Indra which is evident throughout the *Viṣṇu*, even though traces of Indra's sovereignty still exist, as in 3.1.43 where Vāmana gives the three worlds to him.

50

Such identifications in the *Mahābhārata* have already been mentioned on p. 28.

51

For Rāma Jāmadagnya's birth, see *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.66.36–63/*Vāyu* 91.66–92; for his victory over Arjuna Kārtavīrya, *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.69.9–48/*Vāyu* 94.9–47 and *Matsya* 43.13–52.

52

Cf. *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.71.21b–99/*Vāyu* 96.20b–98/*Matsya* 45.3–24,34.

53

The story of Kṛṣṇa's birth is also told in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.71.196–

241 */Vāyu* 96.192–232/*Matsya* 47.1–12. Both here and in *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.72.4–5/*Vāyu* 97.4–5 and *Matsya* 47.31b–2,33b, where the question of Kṛṣṇa's birth is raised again, Viṣṇu's manifestations are usually described by the word *prādurbhāva*. Except in the *Viṣṇu*, parts of are little used in this narrative, the only instance being *so 'vatīrṇo mahīm* in *Matsya* 47.11.

54

Kalki is also included in the *Brahmāṇḍa/Vāyu* and *Matsya* lists.

55

Viṣṇucitta's *Vyākhyā* and Śrīdhara's *Ātmaprakāśa* both give these ‘eight supernatural powers’ as *aṇimā* (the power of becoming minutely small), *laghimā* (the power of becoming weightless), *prāpti* (the power of obtaining everything), *prākāmya* (absolute freedom of will), *mahimā* (the power of becoming boundlessly large), *īśitva* (absolute supremacy), *vaśitva* (the power of subduing everything to one's will), *kāmāvasayitā* (the power of totally suppressing desire). The *Ātmaprakāśa* also gives an alternative list, with *garimā* (the power of increasing one's weight) instead of *kāmāvasayitā*.

56

Although they are not said to be Viṣṇu's *aṃśas*, three names which should also be mentioned are Kuvalayāśva (4.2.39–41), Purukutsa (4.3.4–15) and Khatvāṅga (4.4.76–82). The first two are specially empowered by Viṣṇu for heroic deeds, while the third attains release by achieving absorption into Vāsudeva.

CHAPTER FIVE

1

‘He created another body for himself as he did of old at the beginning of other *kalpas;* he assumed the shape of a boar as he had that of a fish, a tortoise or some other’ (*akarot svatanūm anyāṃ kalpādiṣu yathā purā / matsyakūrmādikāṃ tadvad varāhaṃ vapur āsthitaḥ //*)

2

This is true also of Kirfel's parallel Sarga-Pratisarga passages, *Mārkaṇḍeya* 47.1–14a, *Vāyu* 6.1–34 and *Brahmāṇḍa* 1.1.5.1–28, where the god who assumes the form of the Boar is Brahmā rather than Viṣṇu. At the same time the motif of rescuing the earth, which has sunk beneath the waves, is very close to that of *bhārāvataraṇa*, relieving the earth of its burden, the purpose for which the gods descend.

3

All the appearances are animal forms, and the presence of *aśva* rules out the possibility that this is intended to be part of the classic *avatāra* list.

4

There is also a similarity in the situation of the speaker in the first three passages, since PṚthivī, Prahlāda and Kāliya all praise Viṣṇu while they are submerged under water.

5

Similar statements occur elsewhere (e.g. *Viṣṇu* 5.30.23; *Hv* 58.40; *Matsya* 247.38–40/*Hv* Appendix 1, No 42, lines 80–6) but, apart from *arcanti* in *Matsya* 247.40, they do not employ the characteristic vocabulary of these four *ślokas*.

6

The fact that these instances are divided equally between Books 1 and 5 could possibly be a way of drawing the hearer/reader's attention to the polarity between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa which is discussed at the end of this chapter.

7

The Supreme God is called Nārāyaṇa in vv14,29, but in this episode, as elsewhere in the *Viṣṇu*, his most frequently used name is Viṣṇu.

8

In the *Mahābhārata* this episode is a duplicate version of the

descent of the gods, and appears separately from it, at 1.189.31.

9

In a sense Viṣṇu is not remote at all: as Brahmā tells the other gods, 'You and I and Śiva all have Nārāyana as our essential being' (*ahaṃ bhavo bhavantaś ca sarve nārāyaṇātmakāḥ*, 5.1.29).

10

Cf. *Viṣṇu* 1.9.119, where Indra, praising Śrī, calls her Svadhā, Svāhā and Sudhā. Svāhā and Svadhā are also used of Viṣṇu in 6.8.58.

11

Both meanings of 'to pacify'— 'to calm' and 'to reduce to submission' — are present in *kāryā śāntir*, so that the phrase conveys the idea of an action which is at once beneficial and antagonistic.

12

The negative predication which was noted in connection with Viṣṇu seen as the Supreme Reality is in evidence here e.g. *ananta*, v.35; *acintya*, v.37), as is also the language of paradox; Kṛṣṇa is 'smaller than the small and greater than the great' (*aṇor alpaṃ sthūlāt sthūlam*, v.51).

13

Biardeau implies that this represents a misunderstanding of the *Mahābhārata* on the part of the *Viṣṇu: 'Le rapport épique entre les deux héros est inversé: Arjuna aidera Kṛṣṇa, alors que le HV maintient le rapport correct en demandant l'aide de Kṛṣṇa pour Arjuna*' (Biardeau 1978: 218, note 2). But there is no question here of an 'incorrect' understanding: the *Viṣṇu* has its own perspective, in which the Pāṇḍavas play very little part and Arjuna's only significance lies in helping Kṛṣṇa to remove Earth's burden (5.12.22; 5.37.2).

14

The implication is that the girl's joy at meditating upon Kṛṣṇa is so great that it serves her as a full reward for all her merits, while her sorrow at not being in his physical presence is so great as to be sufficient punishment for all her sins.

15

As Sheth points out, this reference to Kṛṣṇa pervading all being, including the husbands of the herder-women, serves as a justification for his relationship with the *gopīs* as well as presenting Kṛṣṇa as divine (Sheth 1984:52).

16

5.20.56 suggests that they identify Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu by the *śrīvatsa* on his chest.

17

This is in keeping with the *Viṣṇu*'s silence on the matter of Kṛṣṇa emitting wolves from himself in order to persuade the herders to move to Vrndāvana (*Hv* 52.29–30).

18

In *Hv* 86 Indra's hall is brought to Dvārakā for Kṛṣṇa himself.

19

As Sheth comments: 'If Kṛṣṇa builds a fortress in Dvārakā, it is not for his own protection but for that of the Yādavas, who will then not have to depend on him for security' (Sheth 1984: 62).

20

This verse has no equivalent in the parallel *Brahma* passage.

21

In translating *sāṃśo* as 'with all his parts' I am assuming that it refers to the Yādavas, who are said in 4.15.48 to be descended gods.

22

In Sāṃkhya terminology *rūpa* is the *tanmātra* which is linked with the *buddhīndriya cakṣuḥ*.

23

This division may be connected with BhṚgu's cursing Viṣṇu to be born as a human being seven times (*Matsya* 47.105–7; *Vāyu* 97.140–2). The three celestial appearances may be intended to show that the seven human ones do not exhaust his repertoire, and that at least some of his manifestations are voluntary.

24

It is hard to be certain exactly where this list is intended to end, because it is immediately followed by a short description of the *kaliyuga* which contains a further reference to Kalki. I have therefore taken the verse corresponding to *Matsya* 47.248 as the end.

25

Brahmāṇḍa 2.3.73.72–3a contains also a reference to Vainya (i.e. PṚthu) offering a sacrifice in the Vaivasvata *manvantara*. The phrase 'It was Brahmā who was the *purohita* during Vainya's manifestation' (*prādurbhāve tu vainyasya brahmaivāsīt purohitaḥ*, v.73a) could be taken to mean that PṚthu rather than Nārāyaṇa was regarded as Viṣṇu's first manifestation. Nārāyaṇa, however,

is more likely in view of the parallels in the *Vāyu* and the *Matsya*.

26

He is designated as ‘Viṣṇu, Kaśyapa's son from Aditi, born of Vasudeva and Devakī (*viṣṇur adityāḥ kaśyapātmajaḥ // devakyāṃ vasudevāt tu* …, vv93b,94a/v.94).

27

This verse is not numbered in the ASS edition of the *Vāyu*, but simply comes between vv103 & 104. 28 The description of the Buddha is similar to that of Kṛṣṇa in *Matsya* 47.2 (cf. *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.3.71.197/ *Vāyu* 96.193. Both are said to be ‘lotus-eyed’ (*puṣkarekṣaṇaḥ*) and to have been born through *tapas*.

28

Hacker 1959: 78.

29

In its *Bhaviṣyaparvan*, all three have their stories told at length. In the Critical Edition these are to be found in Appendix I (Varāha 42; Narasimha 42A; Vāmana 42B).

30

The word never occurs in the *Viṣṇu*.

31

The word never occurs in the *Viṣṇu*.

CHAPTER SIX

1

G. V. Tagare gives an account of the major commentaries on the *Bhāgavata* in the introduction to his translation (Tagare 1976: lxvi–lxix). They include commentaries from the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, even though Rāmānuja himself appears to have made no use of the *Bhāgavata*.

2

'… *veritable Bible krishnaïte* …' Vaudeville 1968: 761.

3

Singer 1968: 31. For other references, see Shulman, in Doniger 1993: 269, note 17.

4

In its list of the eighteen chief *purāṇas* the *Matsya* characterises the *Bhāgavata* as beginning with the *Gāyatrī (Matsya* 53.20).

5

For T. S. Rukmani 'the Viṣṇu sūkta underlies the whole of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa …' (Rukmani 1970: 322).

6

Verbal echoes of the *Puruṣasūkta* are less frequent, but the ideas contained in Ṛ*V* 10.90 are influential throughout the *Bhāgavata*, in 10.1.20 Brahmā is said to praise the Supreme Person '[by uttering] the *Puruṣasūkta (puruṣasūktena*), and there are many descriptions of the Cosmic Man. These are discussed in Chapter 8.

7

E.g. *Bhāgavata* 1.10.25; 2.8.17; 3.28.8; 6.1.53; 6.2.4; 6.9.26; 7.15.31; 8.6.1; 9.24.56; 10.81.4; 12.7.14. The first two examples, together with 6.9.26, 9.24.56 and 12.7.14, are echoes of *BhG* 4.7. *Bhāgavata* 3.28.8 and 7.15.31 are strongly reminiscent of *BhG* 6.11. *Bhāgavata* 8.6.1 is very similar to *BhG* 11.12, even though the vocabulary is different, and 10.81.4 is a direct quotation of *BhG* 9.26 (cf. Abbott 1892).

8

It deals with many of the same themes, the exposition of *kriyā-, jñāna*-and *bhaktiyoga* in 11.20 and of Sāṃkhya principles in 11.22. 11.16 is obviously dependent upon *BhG* 10. It is even possible that this teaching once consisted, like the *Gītā*, of eighteen chapters, since of the present twenty-three, five (7–9, the teaching of the *avadhūta;* 23, the *Bhikṣugītā;* 26, the song of

Purūravas) appear to be originally independent units which have been drawn into this body of teaching.

9

Here and elsewhere (2.7.40; 8.5.6; 8.23.39) the *Bhāgavata* interprets the opening half-verse of ṚV 1.154 in a sense quite different from that of the original: *yaḥ pārthivāni vimame rajāṃsi* is transferred from Viṣṇu ('who has measured apart the realms of the earth', trans. O'Flaherty 1981: 226) to a hypothetical observer of his deeds who, even though he 'measures out the earth's particles of dust', cannot enumerate his exploits.

10

Cf. *Mbh* 12.319.26–29; 320.17, 28–30; 337.45–6, and also Doniger 1993: 31–57 and Shulman 1993: 108–32.

11

Cf. *Mbh* 12.270.28,30.

12

The questioner here is Vidura, who would be well-known to the *Bhāgavata's* hearers as the half-brother of Pāṇḍu and DhṚtarāṣṣra in the *Mahābhārata*.

13

E.g. the *Bhāgavata* and the *Viṣṇu* have the overturning of the cart after the death of Pūtanā, whereas in the *Harivaṃśa* the overturning of the cart comes first.

14

Traditionally commentators have regarded these ten topics as a kind of table of contents, allocating them to Books 3–12 of the *Bhāgavata*. But, as G. V. Tagare points out, some of the topics (e.g. *poṣaṇa/rakṣā; īśānukathā/vaṃśānucarita*) are distributed evenly throughout the *purāṇa*, while there are some *skandhas* (e.g. Book 5) which contain different types of material which do not fit easily under one heading (Tagare 1976: xxiii–xxxiv).

15

However, *Bhāgavata* 12.7.22–4 appears to mean that all the *purāṇas* in the accepted list of eighteen have the same ten topics as the *Bhāgavata*.

16

Rocher 1986: 27–8.

17

Hospital 1973: 10–12.

18

Gail suggests that the 'ten topics' of the *Bhāgavata* may be modelled upon the principal teachings (*saṃhitās*) of the Pāñcarātra system (Gail 1969: 16, note 72). Schrader gives the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā*'s version of the ten as: 1)*bhagavat*; 2)*karman*; 3)*vidyā*; 4)*kāla*; 5)*kartavya*; 6)*vaiśeṣikī kriyā;* 7)*saṃyama*; 8)*cintā*; 9)*mārga;* 10)*mokṣa* (Schrader 1973: 128); the resemblance between these and the *Bhāgavata*'s topics does not seem close.

19

It is also possible that the choice of Śuka may have less to do with the *Bhāgavata*'s relation to the *Viṣṇu* and more to do with the intention to surpass the *Mahābhārata* which has already been mentioned. Whereas the latter is narrated by Vyāsa's disciple Vaiśaṃpāyana, the *Bhāgavata* is narrated by his son.

20

Hardy gives a table showing the lyric metres used by the *Bhāgavata* in the *gopī* passages and says: 'This is a remarkably high proportion of lyric metres; it shows beyond doubt that the BhP wants to be more than a simple epic narrative, viz. a *kāvya*' (Hardy 1983: 491; cf. Biswas 1969: xi).

21

Shulman calls the *Bhāgavata* 'an anomalous Purāṇa' and points to several ways in which it 'can only with difficulty be fitted into the category of Purāṇa, with its genre-specific norms' (Doniger 1993: 124–7).

22

E.g. Kunti reflects upon the *avatāra* idea in her conversation with Kṛṣṇa in 1.8.32–5; Śuka refers Parīkṣit to a discussion between Yudhiṣṣhira and Nārada in 7.1.15–32).

23

Parlkṣit has behaved disrespectfully towards a Ṛṣi who was so deep in meditation as to be unable to show him hospitality; he placed a dead snake around the Ṛṣi's neck. The latter's son therefore cursed him to die from the bite of the snake Takṣaka (1.18.24–50).

24

The word *līlāvatāra* and the ideas connected with it are discussed on pp 171–4.

25

The next verse says that Nārada transmitted this to Vyāsa, whereas 1.7.6 has described Vyāsa as composing the *Bhāgavata* himself, after being exhorted by Nārada to do so.

26

Nevertheless this story is also given a supernatural origin, as it is said to have been first told by Saṃkarṣaṇa to Sanatkumāra and other sages, and thence transmitted via Sāṃkhyāyana to Parāśara and BṚhaspati (3.8.3–8). Moreover, Maitreya refers to it in 3.8.2 as the *Bhāgavata*.

27

It also introduces more material, particularly into the stories of Dhruva and PṚthu, and adds its own characteristic note of emotional *bhakti* (cf. Dhruva in 4.12.18; Vidura in 4.31.28). The story of Dakṣa's sacrifice is also included (4.2–7), possibly because it was felt that the absence of such a famous myth was a defect in a text which purported to set out the whole history of the cosmos. Into the story of the Pracetas brothers an allegory has been inserted, the story of Purañjana (4.25–9).

28

This sequence of lives is related in *Viṣṇu* 4.15.4–17, but without any reference to the events in Vaikuṇṣha which give rise to it.

29

NṚturaṅgavigrahaḥ, 5.18.6.

30

A comparison of this list with that found in *Viṣṇu* 2.2.50–1 / *Mārkaṇḍeya* 54.31 shows some differences. The four forms of Viṣṇu which the other texts mention are Hayaśiras (worshipped in Bhadrāśva), Varāha (worshipped in Ketumāla), Kūrma (worshipped in Bhārata) and Matsya (worshipped in Uttara Kuru). As the above table shows, only the first of these is in agreement with the *Bhāgavata*. It is not easy to see reasons for the differences. The *Bhāgavata* may simply have been following a different tradition (although there is no sign of any such tradition in the texts assembled by Kirfel in his *Das Purāṇa vom Weltgebäude*). But its choice of Nara-Nārāyaṇa for Bhārata may have been a deliberately considered one, a way of indicating that it is 'the human form' (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) who is to be worshipped in Bharata. Clearly he would not have wished to name Kṛṣṇa himself as this 'human form', since Kṛṣṇa is the reality behind all nine forms and therefore not to be identified with any particular one.

31

The *Bhāgavata*'s assertion that the inhabitants of Puṣkaradvīpa worship 'the lord in the form of Brahmā (*bhagavantam brahmarūpiṇam*, 5.20.32) may rest upon a misunderstanding of

Viṣṇu 2.4.86's statement that gods and *asuras* worship Brahmā in Puṣkaradvīpa.

32

Cf. 6.2.8; 6.3.23.

33

Cf. *Viṣṇu* 3.7.14–18,26.

34

This presentation of VṚtra as an example of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* is found also in *Mbh* 12.270–3.

35

Cf. *Hv* 31.14–20 where *pauṣkarako* is said to be the name of the *prādurbhāva* responsible for destroying Madhu and Kaiṣabha.

36

12.11.50 speaks of *bhagavān harir īśvara*ḥ dividing himself in order to protect the world 'in every *kalpa*' (*kalpe kalpe*), but this refers to the sun's orderly progression year after year and not to a succession of *avatāras*.

37

The Manu-, Viṣṇu- and Indra-figures for the two *purāṇas* are as follows:

Manu: Vi & *Bh*	**Viṣṇu:** *Vi*	**Viṣṇu:** *Bh*	**Indra:** *Vi*	**Indra:** *Bh*
Svāyambhuva	Yajña	Yajña	(No name given)	Yajña
Svārociṣa	Ajita	Vibhu	Vipaścit	Rocana
Uttama	Satya	Satyasena	Suśānti	Satyajit
Tāmasa	Hari	Hari	Śivi	Triśikha
Raivata	Mānasa	Vaikuṇṣha	Vibhu	Vibhu
Cākṣuṣa	Vaikuṇṣha	Ajita	Manojara	Mantradyumna
Vaivasvata	Vāmana	Vāmana	Purandara	Purandara

38

These are:

Manu	**Viṣṇu**	**Indra**
Sāvarṇi	Sārvabhauma	Bali
Daksa-Sāvarṇi	Ṛṣabha	Adbhuta
Brahma-Sāvarṇi	Viśvaksena	Śambhu (*Vi*: Śānti)
Dharma-Sāvarṇi	Dharmasetu	VaidhṚta (*Vi*: VṚṣa)
Rudra-Sāvarṇi (*Vi*: son of Rudra-Sāvarṇi)	Svadhāman	Ṛtadhāman
Deva-Sāvarṇi (*Vi*:	Son of Devahotra &	Divaspati

Raucya)	BṚhati	
Indra-Sāvarṇi (*Vi*: Bhautya)	BṚhadbhānu	Śuci

39

It is not easy to see the reasons for the expansion of the stories of Hariścandra (9.7.7–27; cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.3.25) and Bhagīratha (9.9.1–15; cf. *Viṣṇu* 4.4.35).

40

Not only is this word used of Śuka (5.13.26) and Parīkṣit (1.12.17; 1.16.1; 1.18.16,46), but several of the other interlocutors are given this title also (e.g. Nārada, 2.9.41, 4.13.3; Maitreya, 3.4.9; Vidura, 3.20.2, 4.21.8), and it is applied to the figures who play leading parts in some episodes (e.g. Prahlāda, 3.14.47, 5.18.7, 7.4.43; Dhruva, 4.12.8; Priyavrata, 5.1.20; Bharata, 5.7.1; Ambarīṣa, 9.4.13).

41

In 2.1.8–11 Śuka announces to Parīkṣit his intention of reciting the *Bhāgavata* to him. His teaching is what follows, extending from 2.1 to 12.5.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

Even those who know the whole *purāṇa* sometimes speak of it as though Book 10 were completely typical of the whole. Ingalls' evaluation of it as 'the most enchanting poem ever written', for instance, is obviously based on Book 10 (Singer 1968: vi).

2

Yoganidrā in the *Viṣṇu*, Nidrā in the *Harivaṃśa*.

3

The text makes it clear that Vasudeva's part in the conception is important because he is the Lord's agent:

> '16 And the Lord who is the universe's Self, who removes fear from his devotees, entered with a fraction [of himself] into Ānakadundubhi's [i.e. Vasudeva's] mind. 17 Shining like the sun because he possessed the splendour of the Supreme Person, the latter became inaccessible and unassailable to all beings. 18 Then the queen, like the region of the sky [which carries] the moon, carried [within her womb] the world's blessing, the portion of Acyuta, the self of all things now one with herself, entrusted to her mentally by Śura's son (16 *bhagavān api viśvātmā bhaktānām abhayaṃkaraḥ / āviveśāṃśabhāgena mana ānakadundubheḥ // 17 sa bibhrat pauruṣaṃ dhāma bhrājamāno yathā raviḥ / durāsado 'tidurdharṣo bhūtānāṃ saṃbabhūva ha // 18 tato jaganmaṅgalam acyutāṃśaṃ samāhitaṃ śūrasutena devī / dadhāra sarvātmakam ātmabhūtaṃ kaṣṣhā yathā 'nandakaraṃ manastaḥ //* 10.2.16–18).

4

The *Bhāgavata* also presents Vāmana as receiving celestial praise in his mother's womb (8.17.25–8).

5

Cf. Hiraṇyakaśipu's instructions to his servants in 7.2.9–12.

6

The word *mokṣa* occurs somewhat rarely in the *Bhāgavata*, mainly in statements about all four *puruṣārthas*.

7

This is the *saṃskāra* which celebrates the child's first turning himself over from his back to his side.

8

This happens in the *Harivaṃśa* when Kṛṣṇa's foster-mother Yaśodā has gone to bathe in the Yamunā (cf. *Hv* 50.4). *Viṣṇu* 5.6.1–7 gives no specific context for this incident. It simply happens 'on one occasion, whilst Madhusūdana was asleep under the waggon' (*kadācic chakaṣasyādhaś śayāno madhusūdanaḥ*, v.1).

9

This is reminiscent of Kālayavana's experience as described in

Viṣṇu 5.23.17, pursuing Kṛṣṇa 'who cannot be caught by the minds of great ascetics' (*mahāyogicetobhiḥ prāpyate na yaḥ*).

10

A *guhyaka* (from √*guh*, to cover, conceal, hide, keep secret) is an attendant of Kubera, the god of riches, who guards his master's treasures.

11

The three stages of early life are (i) *kaumāra* (up to and including five years old); (ii) *paugaṇḍa* (six to ten years old); (iii) *kaiśora* (eleven to fifteen years old). See Tagare 1978: 1328.

12

Śuka describes him as 'having appeared for the curbing of villains' (*khalasaṃyamanāvatāraḥ*, 10.16.6; cf. v.33).

13

The fire stories are new, and will be considered briefly in the next section, as will also the story of Kṛṣṇa's rescue of Nanda from Varuṇa in 10.28.

14

See Matchett 1986: 125–6.

15

Gf. *Hv* 62.56–7; *Vi* 5.12.12.

16

This episode will be considered in the next section.

17

E.g. the picture of human limbs being washed about in blood in battle against Jarāsaṃdha, 10.50.26–7.

18

Besides these examples from Book 10, in 11.5.48 Nārada mentions Śālva as one who obtained salvation through Kṛṣṇa.

19

10.82.3–4 explains that this is the place associated with Paraśurāma's slaughter of the *kṣatriyas*. *Mbh* 2.1–10 gives the story of Rāma's post-slaughter sacrifice, and identifies Samantapañcaka with Kurukṣetra, the battlefield of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas.

20

Hawley 1983: 54–68.

21

This theme occurs also in *Bc* 1.12.

22

Benjamin Preciado-Solis thinks that this story is modelled on Rāma's killing of Pralamba in 10.18, and that, together with Kṛṣṇa's killing of Vatsa in 10.11.41–4 (modelled on the Dhenuka episode of 10.5.1–40), it is intended to assert Kṛṣṇa's superiority in prowess over his elder brother (Preciado-Solis 1984:71–3).

23

Kṛṣṇa's role here resembles that of Śiva, who absorbs the poison which is a by-product of the churning of the ocean (cf. *Bh* 8.7.18–46).

24

It is not clear whether this includes Rāma. 10.13.35–9 suggests that it does not, but earlier in the text the phrase 'Rāma and other children' (*rāmādayo 'rbhakāḥ*, 10.11.49; *bālakā rāmādayaḥ*, 10.11.53) seems to mean that he has no more understanding than the rest.

25

Pūtanā is not called Bakī in 10.6, but she is said to have flown to Nanda's settlement (10.6.4) and assumed the form of a woman on arrival. In *Hv* 50.20 also she is said to arrive in bird form.

26

This detachment is regarded by the *Bhāgavata* as an essential characteristic of Kṛṣṇa, not only in his dealings with women, further examples of which will be seen later, but in all his relationships (cf. Akrura's statement in 10.38.22 and Uddhava's in 10.46.37).

27

In 10.29.44 there are said to be hundreds of women.

28

The only one of the main wives who does not make such a profession of humble devotion to Kṛṣṇa is Satyabhāmā.

29

Ātmarāma is also used of Kṛṣṇa in relation to the *gopīs* (cf. 10.29.42).

30

The celestial spectator of 10.13.18–20 is, of course, Brahmā. In 10.33.19 the *apsaras-es (khecarastriyaḥ)* and the Moon and his retinue (*śaśaṇkaś ca sagaṇo*) witness with amazement the *rāsakrīḍā*.

31

Cf. Hardy 1983: 522–3.

32

The colophon to 10.80 gives his name as Śrīdāman, but this name occurs nowhere in the text itself, neither is there any mention of Śrīdāman in connection with Sāndīpani in 10.45. There is, however, a cowherd friend of Kṛṣṇa's called Śrīdāman, who is mentioned in 10.15.20; 18.23–4, 22.31.

33

This has no parallel in the *Viṣṇu*, where Kaṃsa simply orders his servants to seek out children and kill them (*Vi* 5.4.13).

34

This is quite different from the note of peasant piety struck by *Vi* 5.6.7.

35

Cf. 10.29.23–7.

36

See Ingalls 1968: 385–7.

37

For a fuller account of *Hv* 68–70, see Matchett 1993.

38

Ingalls 1968: 384.

39

See p. 96.

40

Cf. 1.8.19; 1.15.35.

41

An example of this in Book 10 is the treatment of the 'Six Embryos' who are born as Devakī's first babies. Their births are related in 10.1.56, but their previous lives, which explain these births, are not revealed until 10.85.47–57.

42

There are other elements in *Bhāgavata* 10 which demonstrate this playing about with time and space; e.g. the year that is lost from the lives of the boys of VṚndāvana through the encounter between Kṛṣṇa and Brahmā (10.13), or the ease with which Kṛṣṇa can move through the various spheres of the cosmos to rescue Nanda from Varuṇa (10.28.3).

CHAPTER EIGHT

1

The *Bhāgavata's avatāra* lists are sometimes reckoned to be six in number: the five mentioned here, together with 6.8.13–19, which is not included here, on the grounds that it is not intended as an enumeration of the Lord's *avatāras*, but is part of a protective formula in which various names of the Lord are invoked, not all of which are those of *avatāras* (cf. 10.6.22–6 and Vi 5.5.14–21).

2

See Schrader 1973: 49.

3

This list is found also in *Garuḍa* 1.1.14–33.

4

Like *Hv* 68.37, this is reminiscent of *BhG* 11.8.

5

The *Bhāgavata* does not seem to attach much cosmogonic significance to Matsya and Kūrma. Their stories, together with that of Vāmana, are told in Book 8, which is concerned with *manvantaras*, not in Book 2 or 3 with the other creation narratives.

6

This usage of *kalā* appears to be an innovation on the part of the *Bhāgavata*, based possibly on a connection between the fact that it can mean 'a sixteenth part' and the description of the form of Puruṣa as 'made up of sixteen parts' (*ṣoḍaśakalam*) in 1.3.1. Although in some texts *aṃśa* is said to represent a quarter and *kalā* a sixteenth (see Ghatage 1976: 6), there is nowhere in the *Bhāgavata* any clear indication that the latter is used to denote a smaller part than the former. As with *aṃśa*, the instrumental of *kalā* is sometimes used with *ava*(cf. 2.7.23; 4.16.19; 10.70.27; 11.4.17) or with some word denoting origin (with *jātaḥ* in 1.4.14 and 2.7.26; with *jajñe* in 8.5.4).

7

Cf. the Dhruva episode (4.8–12) and the story of the rescue of the elephant king (8.2.4).

8

I.e. the four *ṛṣis* whose names begin with Sana — Sanatkumāra, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana.

9

Perhaps vv17–18 should be taken separately, so that v.17 refers to Vāmana's exploit and v.18 to Bali's devotion as an example of how the Lord could inspire even *asuras* to *bhakti*.

10

Dhanvantari is not directly connected here with the churning of the ocean.

11

G. V. Tagare, following Śrīdhara, interprets *sitakṛṣṇakeśa* in v.26 to mean that this includes both Kṛṣṇa and Rāma (Tagare 1976: 192–3, note 555). Since the rest of the passage refers only to Kṛṣṇa, this is unlikely. The statement in v.35 that some enemies were killed 'by Hari in the guise of Bala, Arjuna and Bhīma' (*balapārthabhīmavyājāhvayena hariṇā*) makes a dual reference seem even less likely, since it suggests a primacy of Kṛṣṇa over the other figures mentioned which would hardly be consistent with a dual appearance as Kṛṣṇa and Rāma.

12

The name Buddha does not occur. The verse seems to refer to the episode described in *Vi* 3.17–18, where Viṣṇu assumes the form of a heretic in order to lure the *asuras* away from the Vedas and make them vulnerable to the *devas'* attacks.

13

A list of the nine mind-born sons of Brahmā is given in several *purāṇas;* cf. Mitchiner 1982: 36–7.

14

Tagare takes *rājanyaviprabudheṣu* to refer to Rāma Dāśarathi (*rājanya*), Paraśurāma (*vipra*) and Vāmana (*budha*). This brings the list close to the standard *daśāvatāra* sequence (Tagare 1978: 1269).

15

This may be reminiscent of *Vi* 5.18.58. The use of the *vyūha* names, together with the reference to Hayaśīrṣan, suggests affinities with the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan*, where Aniruddha appears in horse-headed form (*Mbh* 12.327.80–2).

16

Single pronouns are used throughout this passage for Nara and Nārāyana, indicating that they are regarded here as one entity.

17

This would appear to refer to Kṛṣṇa's rescue of the 16,000 maidens captured by Naraka (10.59.33–6). Yet Kṛṣṇa's birth is not mentioned until v.22.

18

E.g. Kapila's parents are given as Kardama and Devahūti in 2.7.3 and 3.21.3; Kṛṣṇa's deeds are recounted in 2.7.26–35 in the same order as they are presented in Book 10.

19

Commenting in the frame-narrative on Kṛṣṇa's death, Sūta says: 'Just as he assumed the fish form and others and gave them up, so, like an actor, he gave up the body by which he had destroyed the earth's burden' (*yathā matsyādirūpāṇi dhatte jahyād yathā naṣaḥ / bhūbhāraḥ kṣapito yena jahau tac ca kalevaram*, 1.15.35). Included in Hari's final message to the elephant king is a reference to 'the infinitely meritorious deeds which have been performed by my fish, tortoise and boar *avatāras* among others' (*matsyakūrmavarāhādyair avatāraiḥ kṚtāṇi me / karmāṇy anantapuṇyāni* …, 8.4.21).

20

Śravaṇa and *smaraṇa are* elsewhere said to be the first steps on the way of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, which leads to liberation (cf. 3.25.25).

21

Seeing Kṛṣṇa depart for Dvārakā, the ladies of the royal court of Hastināpura say of him: 'When ignorant-minded kings live unrighteously, there indeed by *sattva* he establishes excellence, truth, divine law, compassion and glory, and has assumed forms for the well-being [of the world]' (*yadā hy adharmeṇa tamodhiyo nṚpd jīvanti tatraiṣa hi sattvataḥ kila / dhatte bhagaṃ satyam Ṛtaṃ dayāṃ yaśo bhavāya rūpāṇi dadhad yuge yuge//* 1.10.25).

22

Tagare takes 10.50.10 to refer to a manifestation in the past, citing Varāha as a possibility.

23

It is to be remembered that in 10.1 Bhūmi comes to complain before Brahmā in the form of a cow.

24

The word *akṣauhiṇī* occurs frequently in this connection (1.11.34; 1.16.34; 9.24.59; 10.48.24; 10.50.8). According to Monier-Williams, an *akṣauhiṇī* is an army consisting of 21,870 elephants, 21,870 chariots, 65,610 horse and 109,350 foot.

25

'33 I, whose body was well adorned by the illustrious feet of the Lord, bearing the marks of the lotus, thunderbolt, goad and flag,

outshone the three worlds after receiving splendour from him. When this ended, he left me as I smiled. 34 And he, the self-dependent, removed my excessive burden, the hundred armies of the āsuric dynasties of kings. Having assumed a beautiful body as a Yādava, by his valour he made you complete in yourself when you were unable to stand for want of legs. 35 And what woman could bear separation from the Supreme Man, with his loving glances, sweet smile and atttractive conversation? In the same way that he removed the steadiness from the women of the house of Madhu, the marks of his feet made my hair bristle' (33 *tasyāham abjakuliśaṅkuśaketuketaiḥ śrīmatpadair bhagavataḥ samalaṃkṚtangī / trīn aty aroca upalabhya tato vibhūtīṃ lokān sa māṃ vyasṚjad utsmayatīṃ tadante //* 343 *yo vai mamātibharam āsuravaṃśarājñām akṣauhiṇīśatam apānudad ātmatantraḥ / tvāṃ duḥstham ūnapadam ātmani pauruṣeṇa sampādayan yaduṣu ramyam abibhrad aṅgam / /* 35 *kā vā saheta viraha*ṃ *purusottamasya premāvalokarucirasmitavalgujalpaiḥ / sthairyam samānam aharan madhumāninīnāṃ romotsavo mama yad aṅghriviṣaṅkitāyāḥ //* 1.16.33–5).

26

Near the end of the chapter appears another more general statement that 'the Great Self's manifestations are for the good of the world' (*ete lokahitārthāya prādurbhāvā mahātmanaḥ*, v.148).

27

As O'Flaherty points out, 'the opposition between the gods and the demons is purely structural; they are alike in all ways except that, by definition, they are opposed. The two groups are functionally but not essentially opposed, in conflict over the acquisition of power …' (O'Flaherty 1980: 64).

28

Nevertheless the *avatāra* defeats other foes as well, sometimes described as evildoers (e.g. the *asatām* of 3.17.31; the *nāga* Kāliya, cf. 10.6.33; cf. *Vi* 5.7.9; *Hv* 55.56), or as those who have gone astray (3.1.44).

29

Even Varāha becomes the Daitya Hiraṇyākṣa's killer in the version of his story which is now found in CE's Appendix I, No.42.

30

See p. 119.

31

Vena was killed by Ṛṣi*s* for his arrogance and impiety. His story is told in *Bh* 4.14.

32

It should not be forgotten that Kaṃsa and Śiśupāla are also Kṛṣṇa's kinsmen.

33

This teaching is found also in 10.29.15 and 10.85.43.

34

The teaching of Ṛṣabha's sons in Book 11 has already been mentioned on pp 158–9.

35

3.33.5 could be taken to mean that different *avatāras* have different purposes: 'O lord, you exist in bodily form in order to subdue the wicked and for the prosperity of those who live in accordance with your commands. As you have other *avatāras* such as that of the Boar, so this one is for attaining the path of self-realisation' (*tvaṃ dehatantraḥ praśamāya pāpmanāṃ nideśabhājāṃ ca vibho vibhūtaye / yathāvatāras tava sūkarādayas tathāyam apy ātmapathopalabhdaye //*).

36

The only other *avatāra* besides Kṛṣṇa who is associated with teaching is Rāma Dāśarathi, who is said to instruct human beings by his example (5.19.5).

37

On this theme see also Sheth 1984: 147–54.

38

It is found also in the *Bālacarita*, where Ariṣṣa, realising Dāmodara's true identity, says: 'If I am slain by Viṣṇu I shall go to heaven' (Prose between III.13 and 14).

39

Vi 4.15.13 is reminiscent of the passages which describe yogic meditation upon Viṣṇu's form.

40

Note also *līlātanubhiḥ* (7.7.34), *līlātanūḥ* (10.58.37) and *līlātanos* (10.90.49).

41

Kinsley 1975: 77–8.

42

E.g. *Padma* 1.13.246.

43

It is used of the overturning of the cart (50.5); the uprooting of the trees (51.15); the Kāliya episode (55.57, 56.9).

44

See Matchett, in Werner 1993: 112–13.

45

Note also Clifford Hospital, in Sax 1995: 27, where he points to the use of *jalakrīḍā* in connection with Varāha in *Vāyu* 6.11/ *Brahmāṇḍa* 1.15.11, *Matsya* 248.64 and *Kūrma* 1.6.8. He claims that ‘prior to the *Bhāgavata* this is the only association of the idea of play with an *avatāra* other than the pair of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa’.

46

See Hospital 1980: 8–10, and in Sax 1995: 27–8.

CHAPTER NINE

1

Cf. *Vi* 6.5.69–72.

2

‘With tedious regularity this phrase is mistranslated as ‘not thus, not thus’… What the phrase means is that the *ātman* can be described, but only in terms of negative attributes. The phrase itself reads: “This here is the *ātman* [described as] ‘not’, ‘not’” (Hardy 1994: 490–1). See also Olivelle 1996: 305.

3

Cf. Hardy 1990: 79.

4

In 22.2 Nahuṣa's eldest son Yati takes up the life of an ascetic and thus becomes ‘one with *brahman*’ (*brahmabhūta*). In 31.59 Viṣṇu is said to be ‘identical with *brahman*’ (*brahmamaya*). Kṛṣṇa is identified with ‘the eternal *brahman*’ (*brahmasanātanam*) only in the extension to the earliest *Harivaṃśa*, at 113.78 (he is also identified with truth, *dharma* and *tapas* in the same *śloka*, so it may well be that *brahman* here represents the Vedas or sacred knowledge).

5

However, the adjective *paramātmavān* is used of Viṣṇu in 39.15, and also in 30.33.

6

E.g. *bhagavān atrir … bhagavān bh*Ṛ*guḥ*, 20.23; *bhagavān brahmā*, 62.38.

7

The exceptions are both uses in connection with Kṛṣṇa: 60.22, where Kṛṣṇa's divinity is being stressed in order to make a sharp contrast with the humble role which he is playing here, worshipping himself in his mountain form along with the other cowherds, and possibly 56.35, although this word is somewhat ambiguous: *sarpāriketana* (‘eagle-bannered’) is given by Monier-Williams as a name of Kṛṣṇa in the *Harivaṃśa*, which would reduce it to another example of the title *bhagavān* followed by a proper name. Clearer instances of the absolute use *of bhagavān*, in 100.60 and 104.16, lie outside the ‘original’ *Harivaṃśa*.

8

See pp 42–3.

9

In *Hv* 1–29 Viṣṇu's role in the cosmos is played down, then in 30–8 it becomes central to the manifestation of his *prādurbhāvas* and his deeds as the gods' champion. Another sort of concealment is presented in the yogic sleep of *Hv* 39, from which Viṣṇu wakes to take a leading role once more, until he conceals himself in Devakī's womb (48.9), ready to be born as Kṛṣṇa.

10

Cf. 4.13.20,21,36,53,59,61,64,70,108,141,162; 4.14.28,52,53; 4.15.34,36; 4.20.52.

11

See pp 94–5, and cf. *Mbh* 1.189.31.

12

See pp 72–3 for examples of this language.

13

Of the thirty-nine instances which occur in Books 10 and 11, 35 refer to him, and the others (10.87.1,49; 11.28.22,23) make no identification between *brahman* and any being other than Kṛṣṇa. On four occasions Kṛṣṇa is directly addressed as *brahman:* by Akrūra in 10.41.5 and 10.48.19, by Nārada in 10.70.40, and by the sages who speak in 10.84.20. Besides these examples of the vocative, there are several instances where the dative *brahmaṇe* occurs with *namaḥ* (10.10.33; 10.16.40; 10.28.6; 10.49.13; 10.59.28; 10.64.29; 10.85.39).

14

The plural presumably indicates Yudhiṣṣhira and his brothers.

15

There are some books of the *Bhāgavata* where Viṣṇu is identified more frequently with *bhagavān* than in the others. These are Book 3, where the influence of the *Viṣṇu* is particularly strong (though not Book 4, which is also close to the *Viṣṇu*), and Books 7 and 8.

16

Although the *Bhāgavata* places the *gopīs* in this pre-eminent position, they are in some ways overshadowed by Uddhava and the other (all male) *mahābhāgavatas*. It is the latter who teach and receive the *bhāgavata-dharma*, and who affirm the devotion of the *gopīs* as though this requires male endorsement if their example is to be part of the teaching transmitted by and to Kṛṣṇa's *bhaktas* (cf. 10.47.63).

17

Hacker 1959: 21–8.

18

1.2.6; 6.3.22; 7.7.55; 11.14.14.

19

Cf. Hardy 1983: 542–7.

20

See p. 8.

21

Cf. 1.3.5; 2.6.41; 3.6.8.

22

They are also used in the parallel passage, *Bh* 10.6.22–9 (Keśava, v.22; Govinda, v.25). In both passages, however, these names appear to be intended for Viṣṇu rather than referring directly to Kṛṣṇa (cf. also the protective formula in 6.8.12–34).

23

Although Śiva is usually regarded as the conqueror of Tripura, there is at least one myth which gives Viṣṇu an important part in its overthrow. In the form of a cow he drinks dry the well of immortality which Maya has created for the *asuras*, and then provides Śiva with the equipment which he needs to destroy Tripura (*Bh* 7.10.53–71). Nothing in this narrative, however, has any apparent connection with *Hv* 65.38.

24

This is presumably a reference to Paraśurāma, but if so it is to an otherwise unknown episode in his life: 'protected by Āṇgirasa his *guru's* son, the Bhārgava took possession of the *asuras*' magic and caused a drought' (*pālito guruputreṇa bhargavo 'ngirasena vai / praviśya cāsurīṃ māyām anavṚṣṣiṃ cakāra ha //* 65.39). There are several variants for *pālito* and *cāsurīṃ*, but none which gives a more probable-seeming reading.

25

A variant of the CE reading of *Hv* 68.37 has the singular of *prādurbhāva*, which would presumably relate to Kṛṣṇa alone.

26

Cf. Filliozat 1973.

27

Hv 47.30–2, 48.2–7; *Vi* 5.1.72–75, 5.2.2a; *Bh* 10.2.7–8,13,15.

28

In 5.15.14 Kaṃsa also identifies them both with Viṣṇu: 'Produced from an aspect of Viṣṇu as Vasudeva's two sons, born expressly to destroy me, they are growing up evil (*vasudevasutau tatra viṣṇor*

aṃśasamudbhavau / nāśāya kila sambhūtau mama duṣṣau pravarddhataḥ //).

29

Couture points out that Pralamba seeks out 'chinks' or 'gaps' (cf. 58.12,16) in the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa (Couture 1977: 234).

30

For the roles of the two brothers in the Kāliya and Pralamba episodes, see Matchett 1986: 118–21.

31

Cf. *Mbh* 12.70.6,25; 12.139.9–10.

32

'*Ātmānaṃ kim anantaṃ na vetsi yat*' could of course also be translated as 'Do you not know that you are Ananta?' Although these words may seem incongruous in the mouth of Rāma, who is himself identified with the cosmic serpent Ananta/Śeṣa, they fit in well with the comparison made by Kāliya's wives in 5.7.55–6 between the weakness of their *nāga* husband and the strength of Kṛṣṇa who supports the world (presumably as Ananta).

33

The use of *ava√lamb* here may be intended to evoke the name of Rāma's antagonist, Pralamba.

34

The corresponding passages in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu* know nothing of this usage.

35

See pp 63–4.

36

Kinsley 1974: 272.

37

See Hawley 1983.

38

Just as today, to quote A. K. Ramanujan, '… few Hindus, if any, know a Purāṇa as a whole text; they just know the stories'. He continues: 'Like most Hindus, for instance, I know the details of the avatars of Viṣṇu, but I do not know the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*' (Doniger 1993: 104).

39

As has already been seen, Narasiṃha's killing of Hiraṇyakaśipu is mentioned in 1.20.32, but this reads like a reference to some

story other than the one which is being currently told.

40

For ‘mini-purāṇas’ see Rocher 1986: 95–9.

41

The symbolism found here and in parallel purāṇic passages is analysed in Agrawala 1963.

42

The use of this name, rather than Viṣṇu, is untypical of this text.

43

See *Mārkaṇḍeya* 47.3–14.

44

Perhaps the *Bhāgavata* has borrowed this idea of an expanding form from the stories of Vāmana and Matsya (cf. 8.20.21–34; 8.24.17–26).

45

See p. 116.

46

Pocock refers to this story as a ‘submerged and fragmented’ narrative which surfaces every so often in such a way that ‘it cancels out the [main] narrative by reminding us suddenly that we have been attending to a kind of shadow play’ (Das 1986: 19).

47

Although the overall emphasis is upon Kṛṣṇa's liberation of his enemies, the second Varāha story also shows that the *Bhāgavata* takes up the theme of the *devāsura* conflict in which the *Viṣṇu* has shown little interest.

48

It appears in the Critical Edition as Appendix 1, 42.

49

‘*… der fast geniale Einfall, Prahlāda als Kind auftreten zu lassen*’ (Hacker 1959: 76–7).

50

According to 1.11.34 Dhruva is ‘four or five years old’ (*catuḥpañcabdasambhūto*). Cf. 1.12.17.

51

See pp 91, 92–3.

52

In claiming that this story may have been invented by the *Viṣṇu* I do not wish to deny that the theme of ‘God is a Heretic’, to use

O'Flaherty's chapter heading, is frequently encountered in the Purāṇas (cf. O'Flaherty 1980: 272–320).

53

See p. 17.

54

See p. 136.

55

See p. 179.

56

E.g. Hacker's point about negative and paradoxical language.

57

Kirfel 1979: xvii.

58

Pargiter 1904: iv.

59

Pargiter thought that Madalasā's teaching runs only as far as Chapter 27, 'but the following cantos 28 to 35 in which she expounds the laws regarding brahmans, śrāddhas, customs &c. hardly accord with the story of her position and knowledge, and seem to be an interpolation' (Pargiter 1904: vi). In a sense this makes it all the more remarkable that an interpolator should have ascribed all this teaching to a woman.

60

Op. cit.: iv.

61

Rāma occupies this place in the first song of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*, which ends with the words, 'Glory to you, Kṛṣṇa, having assumed your ten forms' (*daśākṚtikṚte kṛṣṇāya tubhyaṃ namaḥ*, Miller 1977: 131).

62

E.g. *ŚrīcaitanyacaritāmṚta, Madhyalīlā* 9.78,80–7,93–107 (in *ŚrīcaitanyacaritāmṚta*, Vol.4, tr. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda; Los Angeles, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1975).

63

'The many texts that Rāmānuja quotes from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa … strikingly illustrate Rāmānuja's thesis of organic relationship as the principal characteristic of the unity of God and universe. That they were the original inspiration for Rāmānuja in his adopting this organic view point is clearly a strong possibility' (Lott 1976: 30–1). Lott regards the *Bhagavadgītā* as the origin of the teaching

in these passages from the *Viṣṇu (Ibid.:* 31).

64 Ingalls 1968: 385.

Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

ABORI	Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute
ASS	Ānandāsrama Sanskrit Series
AITM	Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient
HR	History of Religions
IA	Indian Antiquary
IHQ	Indian Historical Quarterly
IIJ	Indo-Iranian Journal
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
NIA	New Indian Antiquary
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlāndischen Gesellschaft

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